

PUBLIC WITNESS EVENT

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
MONDAY, January 16, 2006

Public Gathering: Prayers of the People

Read by Rose Berger (Sojourners) and Stephen Picha (Center for Action and Contemplation)

SUNG RESPONSE: *Lord, hear our prayer (repeated)*

Rose Marie Berger: With all our heart and with all our mind, we lift up our voices to you our God. We know that you hear our prayer. Fill our hearts with your loving and attentive listening. Fill us with your peace from above, with the loving-kindness that can come only from you, and with the salvation that can not come from mortal life but from you alone.

Stephen Picha: We offer to you our fervent plea for the body of Christ; we pray for our churches and communities of faith. Teach us to be a church like Dr. Martin Luther King described: “A church that is not merely a thermometer that records the ideas and principles of popular opinion; but a thermostat that transforms the mores of society.” Help us as we strive to overcome our political and theological divisions and disagreements. Help us to come together to work for the shalom of the places where you have sent us. Help us as we make our pledge to work for an answer to Jesus’ prayer when he prayed that “we may all be one.” For the peace of the world, for the peace of the church, for the peace of the people.

SUNG RESPONSE: *Lord, hear our prayer (repeated)*

Rose Marie Berger: Fear of the Lord, you said, is the beginning of wisdom. We pray for those who hold the responsibility of leadership in the body of Christ. May humility be their walking staff; may generosity of heart be the lamp at their feet; may great power be used for the service of the small and vulnerable. For we know what Dr. King said is true: Indeed, “The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Stephen Picha: You, O Lord, have no hands on earth but ours. No feet, no smile, no warm embrace, but ours. No voice for justice, peace, mercy, and love, but ours. Help us in our conversion as children of God. We may be the only gospel our neighbor ever sees. Help us be clear. Help us be kind. Help us be courageous. Help us to be the people of God.

SUNG RESPONSE: *Lord, hear our prayer (repeated)*

Rose Marie Berger: We tremble for our country when we think that God is just. We ask God’s mercy for our nation. We pray for the deepening conversion of our political leaders. For President Bush and Vice President Cheney and their staffs, we pray; for members of the Cabinet, we pray; for Senate leaders Frist and Reid, we pray; for House leaders Hastert and Pelosi, we pray; for all members of Congress and their staff, we pray. Give them the wisdom and guidance to rule with righteousness and justice.

Stephen Picha: In the heart of the most powerful country in the world, we hold up to you Lord the “little ones” of Washington, D.C., and our neighbors in communities across the United States. We hold up to you those of us who are children without access to adequate food or education or family support; we who are homeless without access to a safe, clean, and loving home; we who have been evicted for not being able to pay the rent; we who work three jobs and raise three kids and still go to the food lines at the end of the month to make ends meet; we who are sick, alone, scared, in prison; we who have been

raped, beaten, abused, and neglected. Help us to reach out to one another in small ways and large. Help us to be “neighbors” to one another. “The good neighbor,” said Dr. King “looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all of us human and, therefore, of one family.” We pray for those of us, and all, who minister in places of danger, poverty, and despair. Protect us. Give us courage. Strengthen our hearts. Lead us all toward your common good.

SUNG RESPONSE: *Lord, hear our prayer (repeated)*

Rose Marie Berger: Lord, you said that you send rains on the just and the unjust alike. Why then is it that the poor suffer so totally in rains and in drought? Help us to rebuild communities that are truly on a firm foundation. Help us to rebuild New Orleans into a city where saints and sinners alike uphold the rights of the poor. Help us to put our mighty resources at the service of the 223,000 killed or missing in the tsunami and the 2 million people made homeless in its aftermath. Show us how to honor the more than 73,000 killed in the earthquake in Pakistan and the 3.5 million people who need help rebuilding.¹ Our earth is groaning under our own weight.

Stephen Picha: Teach us, O Lord, how to return dignity to food production and care and affection to our relationship with the earth, so that hunger and famine can be diminished and blessing and holiness and joy increased. Teach us to move in righteousness with the harmonies of the earth. Teach us to govern in ways that honor your creation. Your beautiful world has trouble breathing. Show us how to preserve and protect the air and water and trees and rainforest and parks and wild places that give us the breath of life. Your world is your first revelation. Teach us to love your revelation in creation.

SUNG RESPONSE: *Lord, hear our prayer (repeated)*

Rose Marie Berger: Help us Lord to honor our elders. Help us to tend gently the sick. Show us how we can, as a country, maintain and strengthen a social, economic, and spiritual safety net for those in need. Help us to order our society in such a way that times of need are temporary and not permanent states or generational conditions. We pray for our elders among us who are financially dependent on Social Security and Medicaid; for those without health insurance and who depend on Medicare; for children whose good health depends on the Children’s Health Insurance Program; for single parents struggling to raise a family. Give us the strength and conviction we need to offer the means to live a full and healthy life to all.

Stephen Picha: We pray for the worker who can’t get a job. And the worker who can’t get home because she’s got three jobs. We pray for the underfed and overnourished. We pray for those in physical prisons, mental prisons, and spiritual prisons. We pray for the detainees that are caged at Guantanamo and in secret bases around the world. We remember your promise that “nothing is covered that shall not be revealed; nothing is hidden that shall not be known” (Matthew 10:26). We pray for those who are unjustly persecuted—especially those who suffer for their faith. We ask your mercy on all the ways we degrade our human bodies through unhealthy or commercialized sexuality; through addiction to chemical substances; through sinful patterns of action; through taking more than we need, hoarding what we have, and idolizing the culture of “mine.” Teach us to live with dignity and loose the fetters of bondage of all those who are enslaved.

SUNG RESPONSE: *Lord, hear our prayer (repeated)*

¹ United Nations reports (2005)

Rose Marie Berger: Forgive us, Lord, for making war. Show us how to end the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, in Israel and Palestine, in Darfur and Congo, in Tibet, China, Burma, and India, in Colombia and Chechnya, on the U.S. border with Mexico, in the inner cities of the United States. Forgive us, Lord, for making terror—in our homes, our nation, and abroad. Bring justice to those who spread fear and violence. Bring peace and healing to those who are their victims. We pray for the captives—especially Christian Peacemaker Team members James Loney, Norman Kember, Tom Fox, and Harmeet Sooden. We pray for the captors—especially those currently holding our four brothers.

Stephen Picha: Most gracious and merciful God, we ask the impossible because we are people of miracles. We believe, with Dr. King, that “Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time... We must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.” Let us be the generation that breaks the archer’s bow and hammers grenades into fair trade agreements. Let us be the generation that says, “In my time we made a pledge to study war no more. In my time, we made a world where each person could sit under their own vine and fig tree and live in peace and unafraid.”

SUNG RESPONSE: *Lord, hear our prayer (repeated)*

Rose Marie Berger: Lord, we remember all those who have died in the hope of the resurrection. We remember all those who have departed this life. We remember all those who mourn and weep. We thank you for those who have touched our lives so deeply, that their passing to you is, for us, an occasion both of gratitude and grief.
(A moment of silence.)

Stephen Picha: Lord, we remember all those who will come after us. We hold up the generations ahead who will find life in your word. May we leave them the legacy that Dr. King left us when he said that “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.” May future generations say of us that we were a faithful people whose feet were dusty from walking in Your Way, whose hearts were burning with love, whose hands were callused with service to the least, and whose eyes were fixed on justice.

Rose Marie Berger: For the absolution and remission of our sins and offenses, hear us Lord.

Stephen Picha: That we may end our lives in faith and hope, without suffering and without reproach, hear us Lord.

Rose Marie Berger: By your grace, defend us, deliver us, and in your compassion protect us, O Lord.

Stephen Picha: To you, O Lord our God, we lift up our prayer, you who are our Rock and our Redeemer.

SUNG RESPONSE: *Lord, hear our prayer*