

PAX CHRISTI USA COMMUNITY LENTEN SERVICE – week 1

First week of Lent – [Readings are from Thursday, March 10th](#)

Welcome

*We'll be remembering tonight: **Bishop Walter Sullivan**, long-time bishop-president of Pax Christi USA and an Ambassador of Peace; **Nickie Valdez**, former member of the Pax Christi USA Anti-Racism Team and National Council member; and **Tonie Malone**, a long-time leader with Pax Christi New Jersey and Ambassador of Peace*



Opening song

Singer will be the only one unmuted but feel free to sing along wherever you are!

Opening Prayer: On Pax Christi USA's 50th Anniversary

God of Peace and Justice,

As we journey through our 50th Anniversary Year,

Make us weavers of your peace that will only come through justice,
taking up the threads of peacemakers who have gone before,
adding our collective contributions with creativity,
and making space for future generations to join this tapestry.

Keep us firmly rooted in your love,
love that transcends time and space.
Guide us with clarity of vision
to study the past in order to learn from history
and heal wounds that still hurt us.

Let us acknowledge your presence as we look to the future.
Nourish our enthusiasm,
Help our dreams emerge,
and enable hope to blossom.

Together, we will learn from one another,
amplify prophetic voices,
and weave the work of peace, justice,
mercy, and love that transforms.

We ask all of this through our brother Jesus,
Way of Nonviolence,
Weaver of Peace.

ALL: Amen.

First reading: From the book of Esther...

Queen Esther, seized with mortal anguish,
had recourse to God.
She lay prostrate upon the ground, together with her handmaids,
from morning until evening, and said:
“God of Abraham and Sarah, God of Isaac and Rebekah,
and God of Jacob, Leah and Rachel, blessed are you.
Help me, who am alone and have no help but you,
for I am taking my life in my hand.
As a child I used to hear from the books of my ancestors
that you, O God, always free those who are pleasing to you.
Now help me, who am alone and have no one but you, my God.

“And now, come to help me, an orphan.
Put in my mouth persuasive words in the presence of the lion
and turn his heart to hatred for our enemy,
so that he and those who are in league with him may perish.
Save us from the hand of our enemies;
turn our mourning into gladness
and our sorrows into wholeness.”.

The word of God. **ALL: Thanks be to God.**

Gospel reading: From the gospel of Matthew...

Jesus said to his disciples:
“Ask and it will be given to you;
seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds;
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
Which one of you would hand their child a stone
when they asked for a loaf of bread,
or a snake when they asked for a fish?
If you then, who are wicked,
know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will your heavenly parent give good things
to those who ask.

“Do to others whatever you would have them do to you.
This is the law and the prophets.”

The gospel of our God. **ALL: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

A reflection from this year’s Lenten reflection booklet – Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace Nancy Small: Nancy will read her reflection and offer a few additional words to expand it to include the context we’re living in today.

“Ask & it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Mt 7:7-8)

Today we hear the pleading prayer of Queen Esther alongside the gospel invitation to ask, seek and knock. Esther, a Jewish woman conscripted into the royal harem, knew that her people were about to be destroyed. She appealed to the saving power of the liberating God she sought since her youth. She then acted courageously, knocking on the door of the king’s hardened heart to successfully plead her cause and spare the lives of the Jewish people.

Pax Christi’s model of prayer, study & action is our way of living out Jesus’ summons to ask, seek and knock. We root ourselves in prayer, asking for the grace to be agents and artisans of peace. We study issues of injustice and learn from the lived experience of those oppressed as we seek a just world order. We act, knocking incessantly at closed doors in our church and society with a steadfast longing for liberation.

Our time-tested model bears witness to the promise that in seeking we find, by asking we receive, and through knocking the doors shall indeed be opened.

*What is the focus of your prayer, study and action this Lent?
When you find yourself knocking upon closed doors,
how do you hold onto Jesus’ promise that they shall be opened?*

Silent reflection

We invite you to quietly reflect on tonight's readings and reflection, and to consider this Lenten question from the Nancy’s reflection: ***What is the focus of your prayer, study and action this Lent? When you find yourself knocking upon closed doors, how do you hold onto Jesus’ promise that they shall be opened?***

After our prayer service is over, we encourage you if you are with others, to share your answer to tonight's question. If you aren't with others but would like to share in a small group after tonight's prayer, we'll send everyone into breakout rooms with a few other people to share. We'll take now just about 3-4 minutes of silence to reflect quietly.

(In preparation for the Prayers of the Faithful, feel free to enter into the chat any prayers you have that you want those of us on this call to lift up over the coming week.)

Prayers of the faithful

Our response is: God of peace, hear our prayer.

Closing prayer

Prayer for Peace in Ukraine
by Nancy Small

God of Peace, whose light dispels the darkest night,

we pray for the people of Ukraine at this time of warfare and violence.
Give comfort to those who suffer and calm to those who live in fear.
Grant eternal life to those who have died and consolation to those who mourn.
Companion those who are fleeing their homeland and grant them a safe haven.
Open the hearts of those who live in neighboring countries as they welcome refugees.
Convert the hearts and minds of those who choose arms and protect those who wage peace.

God of hope, inspire leaders to seek reconciliation with enemies by embracing nonviolence.
Give diplomats wisdom, understanding and insight and lead them in the way of peace.
May the universal church be salt and light in this dark time.

Inspire compassion in the hearts of all your people
and give us hope for a world where justice rolls down like water
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
We ask this through Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Light of the World,
who taught us “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God,”
through the intercession of Mary, Queen of Peace. Amen..

*(In 1-2 minutes everyone who wants to stay on the call will be sent to
breakout rooms to discuss tonight's reading, reflection and Lenten
question. Breakout rooms will automatically close after 20 minutes.)*