



Bread of Life Ritual

By Nancy Small, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace

This ritual can be used for in-person or virtual gatherings.

Reader: Jesus said, "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?"

Leader: We live in the wealthiest nation on earth, yet millions of people live in poverty. They cry out for life-sustaining bread, but we offer them stones by wasting money on bloated military budgets instead of funding their needs. For our hardness of heart, we pray, God, have mercy.

All: **God, have mercy.**

Leader: Our nation turns a blind eye to those in need of food security, jobs that pay a living wage, affordable housing and childcare, quality education, and healthcare, choosing instead to devote more to military spending than the next ten nations combined. For the moral blindness of our nation, we pray, Christ have mercy.

All: **Christ, have mercy.**

Leader: We could offer all who hunger the bread they need if we were willing to shift our priorities from weapons to the well-being of people in need. But we fail to recognize that true security lies in improving the lives of all people, especially those considered the least among us. For the misguided priorities of our nation which place global military dominance over urgent domestic needs we pray, God, have mercy.

All: **God, have mercy.**

The leader invites all present to come forward and take a stone from the table. For those gathering virtually, ask each person to have a stone with them.

Leader: These are the stones we give to our children when they cry out for bread. They are heavy with the weight of injustice. I invite you now to name an injustice that your stone represents, a theft from those in need because of our nation's gross overspending on military power. You may name your injustice aloud or in the silence of your heart.

(Pause while injustices are named)

Leader: I invite you now to place your stone in this basket.

God, open our ears to hear the cries of those whose needs are sacrificed at the altar of military might. Convert our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh that feel the longings of the least among us, hearts that beat with compassion for the common good. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus, prophet and purveyor of Peace. Amen.

Suggested Songs: Sweet Honey and the Rock – Let There Be Peace; World Peace Prayer (Marty Haugen, C/A Publications)

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

These are revolutionary times. All over the globe people are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression and out of the wombs of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born... We in the West must support these revolutions. Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism...

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.... Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided people.

I believe that even amid today's mortar bursts and whining bullets there is still hope for a brighter tomorrow. I believe that wounded justice lying prostrate on the blood-flowing streets of our nations can be lifted from the dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of humankind.

(excerpted from Prayer Vigil for Disarmament in Our Prayers Rise Like Incense: Liturgies for Peace, Cindy Pile, ed., Pax Christi USA, Erie, PA 1998.)



Leader: We too believe in a brighter tomorrow that shines with the promise of peace. We believe in the banquet table where all members of the beloved community eat their fill. We now set this table before us with our hopes for a brighter tomorrow.

A tablecloth is placed on the table/altar with these or similar words:

Reader 1: We declare this table to be a place where all are welcome, a place where division ceases and diversity flourishes, and a place where all have an equal voice.

Reader 2: We bring to this table compassion and care for the common good.

Reader 1: We make room at this table for those who are marginalized. We want to hear their voices. We want all voices to partake in the national dialogue about funding priorities.

Reader 2: We bring to this table the truth that there is plenty of food for all who hunger to have their fill if we choose bread over stones. We consecrate this table as a place where those who live in poverty can sit down with those who have plenty and share in a harvest of justice.

Participants bring to the table the loaves of bread, one at a time as the leader recites the following words. If the gathering takes place virtually, each participant should have a slice/piece of bread. Lift the bread each time the response is recited.

Leader: Jesus, you promised that those who come to you will never hunger and those who believe in you will never thirst for you are the Bread of Life. We choose the Bread of Life for all who suffer from food insecurity. We lift up to you those who depend on soup kitchens, food pantries, and food stamps to survive. This bread reminds us that there is enough food for all to have their fill if we prioritize food security in our federal budget.

Response: We choose bread, not stones.

Leader: Jesus, you told your disciples that you had nowhere to lay your head. We choose the Bread of Life for all who experience homelessness and housing insecurity. We lift up to you all who rely on shelters or live out of their cars and those facing eviction who cannot afford the cost of rising rents. This bread reminds us that housing is possible for all people if we prioritize affordable housing in our federal budget.

Response: We choose bread, not stones.

Leader: Jesus, you said, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kin-dom of heaven." We choose the Bread of Life for all who experience poverty. We lift up to you all who work multiple jobs but still can't afford life's basic necessities, those whose income cannot compete with rising inflation, and those who live below the federal poverty level with no path to a better quality of life. This bread reminds us that we can break the chains of poverty if we prioritize need and say no to greed in our federal budget.



Response: We choose bread, not stones.

Leader: Jesus, you touched all who came to you in need of healing. We choose the Bread of Life for all who are uninsured or underinsured. We lift up to you those who cannot afford basic healthcare, medications, or lifesaving treatments, those who do not have access to quality healthcare in their local area, and those who are in debt due to exorbitant medical expenses. This bread reminds us that we can provide adequate healthcare for all in our nation if we prioritize community health over military might in our federal budget.

Response: We choose bread, not stones.

Leader: Jesus, you told Peter to put away his sword as you cultivated a culture of peace. We choose the Bread of Life in a culture saturated with gun violence. We lift up to you a nation obsessed with guns, a nation that endures more mass shootings than all other nations combined. We lift up to you those whose lives have been shattered by gun violence. This bread reminds us that we can prioritize initiatives that foster peace and promote the well-being of all over deadly weapons that wound bodies and souls and tear us apart.

Response: We choose bread, not stones.

Reader: Let us hear the words of Pope Paul VI:

Countless millions are starving, countless families are destitute, countless men are steeped in ignorance, countless people need schools, hospitals, and homes worthy of the name. In such circumstances, we cannot tolerate public and private expenditures of a wasteful nature; we cannot but condemn lavish displays of wealth by nations or individuals; we cannot approve a debilitating arms race. It is Our solemn duty to speak out against them. If only world leaders would listen to Us, before it is too late!" (*On the Development of Peoples*)

Leader: Jesus, you multiplied loaves into more than enough for 5,000 people and filled twelve baskets with the excess. You spoke truth to power and amplified the voices of the destitute by accompanying them in their struggle for justice. Multiply our efforts to redirect military spending toward funding for the needs of marginalized communities, we pray. Amplify our voices and open the ears of the powerful to hear and heed our cries.

All: Jesus, Bread of Life, teach us how to fashion the stones of war into the bread of life for all who hunger.

Empower us to be leavening agents of your transforming love.

Show us how to become a nation that chooses bread, not stones. Amen.



Leader: I invite you to join me now in reciting the prayer that Jesus taught us:

All: Our Father/Mother/Abba/Amma, who art in heaven....

All are invited to share in eating the loaves of bread. As the loaves are shared, participants are invited to share their vision of a nation that chooses bread, not stones, including stories of people that are taking steps in this direction at the grassroots/local/national level.

Closing Song: *Lori True – A Place at the Table (GIA Publications)*

