



Vow of Nonviolence prayer service

This is an outline for you to adapt as needed. We suggested you use as many different voices (V) to open and lead prayers/readings. Additional music, readings, and scripture sources for you to draw on are on pages 4-6. Please use your own music, songs, stories to enhance the service for your own context.

Instructions are given in *italics*.

Welcome and setting the scene

Opening music suggestions

- [How lovely on the mountain are the feet of him \(YouTube\)](#)
- **How beautiful are the feet of them** who preach the Gospel of peace from Handel's Messiah (many versions available)

Voice 1: October 2 is the International Day of Nonviolence so as Christians we take time on this day to pray for world peace, to share the Vow of Nonviolence, and to reflect on this year's theme of "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of nonviolence" (cf. Isaiah 52:7), focusing on creative nonviolence in peoples' movements.

Voice 2: We light the Paschal candle to symbolize Christ – the Prince of Peace and the Light of the world – a beacon of hope in the darkness of injustice and conflict that permeates so many countries. We begin by reflecting on our own need of healing asking God to take from our hearts and from our world, everything which obstructs the peace Christ brings. We ask to be made worthy of our calling as children of God.

(V1) Lord Jesus, for the part we have played in the structures of sin, which allow war and violence to affect so many people in this world, our common home. Lord have mercy. **R:/Lord have mercy.**

(V2) Christ Jesus, we witness in the media every day, glimpses of the suffering caused by conflict, forgive us for not doing more to demand that governments end the arms trade. Christ have mercy. **R:/Christ have mercy.**

(V1) Lord Jesus, you have reconciled us to the Creator, we are sorry for the times we have failed to be ambassadors of nonviolence, compassion, and hope. Lord, have mercy. **R:/Lord have mercy.**

People are invited to come forward to light a candle or tea light as they reflect on their own need of forgiveness and healing. Some music could accompany this.

- **Dona nobis pacem:** [Multi-language with Taize community \(YouTube recording\)](#) OR [single voice \(YouTube recording\)](#)
- [Make me a channel of your peace \(YouTube recording\)](#)
- [Nada te Turbe, Taize community \(YouTube recording\)](#)

Reflective teachings (*A range of readings are offered on pages 4-5*)

(V1) On our journey of nonviolence the words and experiences of others give us a glimpse into the human response and the human costs of nonviolence.

Telling five stories: *Two voices relate these stories with a short silence between each one. (See page 4)*

If there is time people could be invited to reflect with a neighbor on how these stories speak to them.

Pope Francis speaks, acts and teaches nonviolence. How do his words help us understand nonviolence in our own lives?

We listen to / watch his video message on nonviolence [Pope Francis's prayer for a nonviolent culture](#)

(V2) Living, speaking, and acting without violence is not surrendering, losing, or giving up anything, but aspiring to everything. As Saint John XXIII said 60 years ago in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, war is madness. It is beyond reason. Any war, any armed confrontation, always ends in defeat for all. Let us develop a culture of peace. Let us remember that, even in cases of self-defense, peace is the ultimate goal, and that a lasting peace can exist only without weapons. Let us make nonviolence a guide for our actions, both in daily life and in international relations. And let us pray for a more widespread culture of nonviolence, that will progress when countries and citizens alike resort less and less to the use of arms.

Preparing to share God's peace

(Voice) Since Covid 19, we have new ways to share the Sign of Peace. While many people no longer touch or shake hands, the sign has become more significant and communal – a time to share our love, trust, forgiveness with one another. Many now bow with hands joined and say “the peace of Christ” to those around them, reinforcing the communal nature of this act. Please share in whatever way is most appropriate for you.

(V1) The Peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Praying for ourselves and our world (*Adapt these for your own needs*)

(V2) Jesus said: “*Blessed are the peacemakers.*” On this day focused on nonviolence, let us ask God to bless all those who bring nonviolent skills and tools to make peace to our world and to grow that gift of peace wherever it is lacking.

The response to each intercession is: **Grant us your peace.**

1. We pray for an end to the culture of violence which pervades our society and is a root cause of war.
Let us pray to our God: **Grant us your peace.**
2. We have just celebrated the Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine & Israel, with its theme was: “No place to lay my head.” We remember that conflict has destroyed homes and livelihoods and caused many deaths in these holy lands, in an endless cycle of violence and retaliation. We pray for all those steadfast peacemakers who have remained in their homeland.
Let us pray to our God: **Grant us your peace.**
3. We pray for young people, who continue to be exploited and unheard, particularly in violent conflict situations, where harming children has become a strategy of war.
Let us pray to our God: **Grant us your peace.**
4. In this Season of Creation we pray for an end to the violent abuse of our earth and her resources. We remember especially indigenous peoples who suffer violent suppression of their rights as they seek to protect their environment.
Let us pray to our God: **Grant us your peace.**
5. For all who work for peace with justice, who live prophetically and take risks for peace. We ask God's blessing today especially on the work of Pax Christi and partners around the world.
Let us pray to our God: **Grant us your peace.**
6. Let us pray for ourselves: may we be gifted by the Spirit with the imagination, the words and the actions that can bring peace where there is none.
Let us pray to our God: **Grant us your peace.**
7. In a moment of quiet, let us place before God our own thirst for peace ...

This might be done in silence or people could be invited to speak their prayer out loud.

Preparing to say the Vow of Nonviolence

(V1) We recall our need of the Holy Spirit in making our commitment to nonviolence.

(V2) A reading from the Gospel of John (14:23-27)

Jesus answered, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Distribute simple origami or other shaped paper and invite people to write their name. Once the Vow has been said together, invite each person to lay their name, around the main (Pascal) to symbolize their commitment to the Vow and to becoming peacemakers who bring the light of Christ to the world.

Together we stand and say the Vow of nonviolence:

Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I vow to practice the nonviolence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God... You have learned how it was said, 'You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will be daughters and sons of your Creator in heaven."

I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus

- by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
- by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence;
- by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;
- by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;
- by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

God, I trust in your sustaining love and believe that just as you gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so you will also bestow abundant grace to fulfil it. Amen.

Music suggestions to bring our celebration to a joyful close:

[The kingdom of God \(Taize, YouTube recording\)](#)

[For the healing of the nations \(YouTube recording\)](#)

or

[Peace Train, special version created for International Peace Day, featuring Yusuf/Cat Stevens \(YouTube recording\)](#)

Resource readings and prayers for service for the Vow of Nonviolence

The [Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action](#) (September 21-October 2) align with [Campaign Nonviolence](#), the [Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine and Israel](#), and the [Season of Creation](#). These are all opportunities for highlighting in our faith the place and power of nonviolence around the world.

Telling five stories

“An important nonviolent tool is the moral reserve of the society, putting their bodies in front of the adversary, in the street, and saying clearly: Stop, we see you and denounce. All the churches can be an important part of that ‘moral reserve,’ but in the Mexican situation the Catholic Church hasn’t done any of that with the radicality the situation of violence needs.”

Pietro Ameglio, academic and long-term campaigner, supporting families of victims of the drugs war and corruption in Mexico.

“The faithful must get to the frontlines themselves. That is where our convictions are tested and come alive.”

Sarah Thompson, worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Colombia to stop land theft by companies exporting palm oil to Body Shop and other businesses.

“The vision so eloquently shared in Laudato Si’ makes it clear that everything is interconnected and we need to make active, creative nonviolence paramount to care for one another and our common home.”

Gill Burrows, campaigner to protect people and sacred lands from new coal mines in New South Wales, Australia.

“We dream (of) a Church which stimulates and supports society and communities to react to violence with nonviolence... Nonviolence is the poor ones’ struggle and therefore God’s struggle.”

Sara Ianovitz, lawyer working with Operazione Colomba, an Italian nonviolent civil peace corps, to bring about the safe return to their country of Syrian refugees exiled in Lebanon.

“My experience of using nonviolence myself and then with communities at war with each other, has motivated me to gain deeper understanding. The language of nonviolence helped me transform myself and empowered me to live and work in hostile environments.”

Elizabeth Kanini Kimau is a community peace-worker in Kenya.

Pope Francis words from prayer video, April 2023

Living, speaking, and acting without violence is not surrendering, losing, or giving up anything, but aspiring to everything. As Saint John XXIII said 60 years ago in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, war is madness. It is beyond reason. Any war, any armed confrontation, always ends in defeat for all. Let us develop a culture of peace. Let us remember that, even in cases of self-defense, peace is the ultimate goal, and that a lasting peace can exist only without weapons. Let us make non-violence a guide for our actions, both in daily life and in international relations. And let us pray for a more widespread culture of nonviolence, that will progress when countries and citizens alike resort less and less to the use of arms.

A reading from the Gospel of John (14:23-27)

Jesus answered, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Additional readings and prayers

Pope Francis, World Peace Day message, 2017

On this occasion, I would like to reflect on *nonviolence* as a style of politics for peace. I ask God to help all of us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values. May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life. When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promoters of nonviolent peace-making. In the most local and ordinary situations and in the international order, may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships, and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms...

Today, sadly, we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying *world war fought piecemeal*. It is not easy to know if our world is presently more or less violent than in the past, or to know whether modern means of communications and greater mobility have made us more aware of violence, or, on the other hand, increasingly inured to it... we know that this "piecemeal" violence, of different kinds and levels, causes great suffering: wars in different countries and continents; terrorism, organized crime and unforeseen acts of violence; the abuses suffered by migrants and victims of human trafficking; and the devastation of the environment. Where does this lead? Can violence achieve any goal of lasting value? Or does it merely lead to retaliation and a cycle of deadly conflicts that benefit only a few "warlords"?

Violence is not the cure for our broken world. Countering violence with violence leads at best to forced migrations and enormous suffering, because vast amounts of resources are diverted to military ends and away from the everyday needs of young people, families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people in our world. At worst, it can lead to the death, physical and spiritual, of many people, if not of all.

Jesus himself lived in violent times. Yet he taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for "it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come" (*Mark 7:21*). But Christ's message in this regard offers a radically positive approach. He unfailingly preached God's unconditional love, which welcomes and forgives. He taught his disciples to love their enemies (cf. *Matthew 5:44*) and to turn the other cheek (cf. *Mt 5:39*). When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery (cf. *John 8:1-11*), and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword (cf. *Mt 26:52*), Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. He walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility (cf. *Eph 2:14-16*). Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation. In the words of Saint Francis of Assisi: "As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that you have greater peace in your hearts."

To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence... The Gospel command to *love your enemies* (cf. *Lk 6:27*) "is rightly considered the *magna carta* of Christian nonviolence. It does not consist in succumbing to evil..., but in responding to evil with good (cf. *Rom 12:17-21*), and thereby breaking the chain of injustice."

Talk given by Marie Dennis, Pax Christi USA 2022 Teacher of Peace, Rome 2022

In 1963 Pope John XXIII published his historic encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, a ground-breaking papal document that sparked and accelerated the Church's work for peace throughout the world. Now, six decades later, more robust Catholic attention to Gospel nonviolence is harvesting more than half a century of advances in peacebuilding and powerful nonviolent action for justice and liberation. This new, deeper understanding of nonviolence is inviting the Church and the world to tap the power of active nonviolence to engage conflict and promote a global paradigm based on socio-ecological justice and radically integral peace.

I believe that we are on the threshold of a new way of being, a new paradigm, a new logic for life. What we are birthing will be closer to the beloved community. It will be richly, beautifully diverse, and decidedly nonviolent. It will not depend on weapons or violent force. It will not perpetuate systemic or structural violence. This new way of being, this new paradigm will nurture inclusive human dignity, respect for the integrity of creation and the kind of right relationships toward which Pope John XXIII was pointing.

This new paradigm will be based on a completely different understanding of our place as humans in the whole Earth community -- and a recognition that we are latecomers at that to a spectacular cosmic reality that we are just now (thanks to the Hubble and Webb telescopes) beginning to see. It will recognize that diversity and relationality are imbedded in the cosmos and essential to survival on this planet. And it will clearly identify and reject violence in all its forms: armed violence, physical violence, gender and racial violence, cultural, ecological, economic, spiritual and psychological violence.

Prayers

Pour out upon us the power of your love,
That we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
As brothers and sisters, harming no one...
Bring healing to our lives
That we may protect the world and
Not prey on it,
That we may own beauty
Not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
At the expense of the poor and the earth.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice,
love and peace.

Adapted from Laudato Si', Pope Francis, 2015

God, our Creator and Redeemer,
May we see the sorrow of war in the
eyes of those who suffer and have
known only violence in their lives.

Give us a voice for those who have
no voice and are not heard; those
who know that there is no tomorrow
in war, and that the violence of
weapons destroys both the beauty
of creation and the joy of life.

That way, with your help, we will
Become true instruments of your peace. Amen.

*Adapted from Pope Francis's Address for the World Day
of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, 2016*

Thank you loving God

For the gift of life
For this wonderful world which we all share
For the joy of love and friendship
For the challenge of helping to build your kingdom

Strengthen

My determination to work for a world of peace and justice
My conviction that, whatever our nationality or race, we are all global citizens, one in Christ
My courage to challenge the powerful with the values of the Gospel
My commitment to find nonviolent ways of resolving conflict - personal, local, national and international
My efforts to forgive injuries and to love those I find it hard to love.

Teach me

To share the gifts you have given me
To speak out for the victims of injustice who have no voice
To reject the violence which runs through much of our world today.

Holy Spirit of God

Renew my hope for a world free from the cruelty and evil of war so that we may all come to share in God's
peace and justice. Amen

Pax Christi England and Wales, Daily prayer

World Peace Prayer

Lead us, Lord from death to life - from falsehood to truth.
Lead us from despair to hope - from fear to trust
Lead us from hate to love- from war to peace
Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe
Peace – Peace – Peace.

Additional resources

[The Eucharist for Gospel Nonviolence](#)
[Prayer ritual with commitment to Gospel nonviolence](#)
[Thirteen stories of creative nonviolence](#)

