Justice Shall Flower in His Days
Bread Not Stones Campaign Prayer Service

Preparations for this prayer service: Create an altar with a container of soil (representing the earth), a candle or lantern (representing light), and a loaf of bread (representing the hunger for justice and compassion). One person is the leader, and two people are readers.

Introduction
This introduction can be used if participants are unaware of our Bread Not Stones campaign and/or may have never seen the bishops’ sign-on statement. If those in attendance already know these things, this introduction is not necessary.

LEADER: The goal of the Pax Christi USA’s Bread Not Stones campaign is to end our nation’s unfettered military spending to make essential investments addressing the human needs in our communities and around the world. We have asked bishops in the United States to add their names to our Bread Not Stones Bishops’ sign-on statement.

READER ONE: A reading of the Bread Not Stones bishops’ sign-on statement (found on the Pax Christi USA website).

READER TWO: In the preamble of Jesus’ teaching of the Golden Rule, He asks his followers, “Which of you, if your child asks for bread, will give them a stone?”

READER ONE: The growing gap between those who are rich and those who are poor is compounded by a growing gap between our nation’s spending on weapons and preparations for war and our commitment to end poverty. Our brothers and sisters who are poor and marginalized cry out for the bread of compassion and justice. Shall we continue to offer them stones?

READER TWO: We are told that our military spending secures peace for our people and the Church recognizes the legitimate need for the adequate defense of nations. But our reliance on unfettered military spending is rooted in a mistaken notion of peace and an erroneous understanding of what constitutes true security for our people.

READER ONE: As Pope Paul VI made clear, “For peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the
establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men.”

**READER TWO:** At the gathering of the world’s bishops during the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, the Church made clear that “[t]he arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race; it is to be condemned as a danger, an act of aggression against the poor, and a folly which does not provide the security it promises.”

**READER ONE:** The Church has repeated many times that "the arms race is to be condemned unreservedly," "it is an injustice," "it is a form of theft," "it is completely incompatible with the spirit of humanity and still more with the spirit of Christianity."

**READER TWO:** In our dioceses we hear the cry of those who are poor, who hunger for the bread of compassion and justice. We hear that cry in our Catholic Charities offices, in our food pantries, in our parish St. Vincent de Paul ministries. We hear that cry in our schools, hospitals, homeless shelters, and immigrant outreach efforts.

**READER ONE:** The U.S. federal budget is a moral document that identifies what we value. We cannot remain silent while our nation squanders hundreds of billions of dollars every year on weapon systems that add little to our nation’s national security while neglecting those who are poor and marginalized in our dioceses and around the world.

**READER TWO:** Our misplaced reliance on new and ever more lethal conventional and nuclear weapons will never bring us the peace for which we long. If we want genuine peace, we must seek justice for the “least of these” by beating our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks.

**Opening ritual of earth, bread and light**

**LEADER:** We gather today between the Feast of the Epiphany and our nation’s celebration of the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Epiphany celebrates the universality of Jesus’ proclamation of the Reign of God. And Dr. King’s holiday calls us to embrace, celebrate and defend the dignity of every person of every race, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and identity.

**LEADER (holding up the container of soil)**

**READER ONE:** This container of good earth is the foundation of civilization. Without it there is no peace and no place to call home. During the UN Climate Summit in December, Pope Francis challenged us, “With the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us
establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and carry out works for the sustainable development of the poorer countries and for combating climate change.” For the earth we raise our voices…

ALL: Our children cry for an Earth made whole.

LEADER (holding up the loaf of bread)

READER TWO: Bread, fruit of the good earth, is the foundation of peace with justice. Our Epiphany psalm response reminds us that “Justice shall flower … For God shall rescue the poor when they cry out, and the afflicted when they have no one to help them. God shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor God shall save.” For those who hunger and are not fed we raise our voices …

ALL: Our children cry for the bread of justice.

LEADER: (holding up the candle/lantern)

READER ONE: In the darkness of our days, we seek the light. Our Epiphany reading from the prophet Isaiah charges us, “Rise up! Your light has come, the glory of God shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you God shines. … Raise your eyes and look about … your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.” For those who are lost in darkness we raise our voices …

ALL: Our children seek the light of justice.

A celebration of moral courage and a call to repentance

LEADER: On January 15, our nation celebrates the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His moral courage in the face of condemnation and death stands as a model for all believers who understand that genuine peace is the fruit of justice, not the ever-increasing production of weapons of war.

READER ONE: Dr. King warned that “a nation that continues to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” He went on to say, “Many cry ‘Peace! Peace!’ while expanding defense budgets that already bulge, enlarging already awesome armies and devising ever more devastating weapons. … The heads of all nations issue clarion calls for peace, yet they come to the peace table accompanied by bands of brigands each bearing unsheathed swords.”
LEADER: For the moral failure of our elected leaders, whose addiction to ever-increasing military spending, causes so much suffering for the poor and marginalized in our nation and around the world, we pray, saving God, have mercy.

ALL: Saving God, have mercy.

READER TWO: Upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. King said, “I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits. … I still believe that one day humankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent goodwill proclaim the rule of the land.”

LEADER: We celebrate those bishops who signed the Bread Not Stones Bishops’ statement [You have the option of reading the names of all the bishops who signed, c.f. the Pax Christi USA press release.] We also celebrate all those who tirelessly work for peace with justice and serve the least among us. We pray, God of compassion, strengthen our commitment to justice.

ALL: God of compassion, strengthen our commitment to justice.

READER ONE: As Dr. King reminded us, “The ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy.” He warned that "[o]ur lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter," and that "there comes a time when silence is betrayal."

LEADER: Of the more than 50 U.S. bishops, archbishops and cardinals that were invited to sign our Bread Not Stones Statement, only 18\(^1\) of them signed. Some decided not to sign, but most hid behind the anonymity of silence. For the failure of our religious leaders and for our own failure to speak out against injustice and the misplaced priorities of our federal budget we pray, saving God, have mercy.

ALL: Saving God, have mercy.

Prayers for conversion and grace

LEADER: Jesus tells us that if we had the faith of a mustard seed, we could move mountains. Today, we acknowledge that the mountain that needs to be moved is us. We do not petition God to do things for us; we pray that God empowers us to act as we are called to do.

\(^1\) As of January 3, 2024
**READER ONE:** Source of our salvation, give us the courage to reject the idols of guns and bombs; that promise salvation and safety, but only bring death and destruction: we pray…

**ALL:** Give us bread, not stones.

**READER TWO:** Creator of the Cosmos, you made us stewards of this garden called Earth; to care for every creature and protect all the elements of water, earth and sky that make life possible. Help us to reject the notion that we are separate from creation, and give us the wisdom and will to nurture all life: we pray …

**ALL:** Give us bread, not stones.

**READER ONE:** Mother of all humanity, you made us different sizes, colors, genders, sexual orientations, and ethnicities, that we might learn to love and celebrate your divinity in our diversity. Give us the clarity of perception to see one another as sisters and brothers; and give us an unwavering conviction to protect and love one another: we pray. …

**ALL:** Give us bread, not stones.

**READER TWO:** God of plenty, you created a world of abundance and instructed us to share the riches of this world with one another -- from each in accordance with their ability; to each in accordance to their need. Give us your spirit of justice, that we may never grow tired in our efforts to protect the dignity of all, we pray…

**ALL:** Give us bread, not stones.

**Benediction and closing song**

**LEADER:** Dr. King was a man of deep faith. As he said, “I still believe that we shall overcome. This faith can give us the courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, we will know that we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born.”

**SONG LEADER:** Let us end our time of prayer singing the civil rights spiritual, “We Shall Overcome.”

**Additional verses:**
We shall speak in truth … TODAY / We shall act in justice … TODAY / We shall work for peace … TODAY