

Prayers in Honor of MLK and For Inauguration Week

Dear Beloved in Christ,

Today, January 18, we honor and celebrate a great man, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He is revered for many roles: civil rights pioneer, outstanding orator, conscience of a nation, and of course, as martyr, who was slain for standing up and speaking out in the cause of freedom, equality, and justice for all. He was also a pastor, and like you and me, a baptized child of the living God. And it is in this vocation that I find particular comfort for these tense and troubling times.



Since this holiday was first set, people everywhere – but especially in this country he loved so deeply and challenged so well, to live up to its ideals – have set aside this day to serve others. But this has become harder to do, on this particular MLK Day. The pandemic is keeping us socially distant and forcing us in many cases to stay in our homes. And the threat of violence brought on by the brutal events of January 6th has made us all hold our breath and clench our teeth, as we wait out this week, and whisper in fear: “Lord, have mercy – what is next?”

Dr. King would not have us cower. Were he alive today, he would counsel us to hope, to faith, to love of neighbor, and to continue in the cause for which he gave his life. And because he was the REVEREND Dr. King, he would call us to recall, take courage, and to be true to our new life in Christ and our call to love one another as he has loved us.

And so, today, if you have a safe way to do so, I encourage you to go out and serve. But it’s also okay to stay home, and serve in other ways: giving online, using the phone to reach out, and more. And of course, as the Rev. Dr. King did so often himself, we are called to pray. Not just today, but each day in this week – especially on Inauguration Day, this Wednesday, January 20.

What follows below, comes from the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, Elizabeth Eaton. I invite you to offer these prayers throughout the week – alone or with your loved ones, with co-workers and friends, in person or online. Share them around as well. Let us rely on our God to get us through, to keep us well and to bring us together as one body of Christ, and one nation under God, with life, liberty and justice for all.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher deForest". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher deForest, Bishop
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Bishop Eaton Offers Prayer For Our Nation



As we reflect on the events at the Capitol on Jan. 6 and look toward the inauguration, and share concern about possible violence at our state and national capitols, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton offers the following prayer:

The psalmist reminds us that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). Our nation is bracing amid reports of acts of political violence planned for the coming days at state capitols and in our nation’s capital. Wherever you are, and whatever your political beliefs, we are one in Christ Jesus. On this firm foundation, as a pastor and a bishop, I invite you to join me in prayer during this time of chaos, confusion, fear and grief. For even when “the nations are in an uproar,” we are encouraged that “the

Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:6a, 7).

Mighty God, our great help in trouble, as distrust, fear and violence threaten our nation and its peoples, we come to you in prayer, seeking your wisdom, strength and peace.

We pray for the health of our democracy and its leaders, that those elected to serve may utilize government structures and processes to promote human flourishing and the common good...

We pray for those who risk harm to ensure the safety of others: police officers, security guards, the National Guard and other military personnel...

We pray for an end to the evils of white supremacy, Christian nationalism, and racial violence that threatens, destroys and kills...

We pray for those experiencing trauma induced by the public display and use of hateful language and symbols, including Confederate flags, anti-Semitic language and images, and nooses...

We pray for Black, Indigenous, People of Color and historically marginalized groups traumatized by violence stemming from white supremacy: lynchings, bombings, vandalism and church burnings...

We pray for clergy and church leaders, especially for those burdened by mistrust and painful divisions in their communities. Give them and all people the courage to confront white supremacy, Christian nationalism and racist rhetoric with messages of truth, sustained by the power of your magnificent love...

We pray for people and communities struggling to discern your voice amid competing voices clamoring for attention. Direct us to listen deeply and celebrate the diversity among us. Freed in Christ, we dare to witness to your promise of abundant life and abiding peace...

In this time of great uncertainty, we pray without ceasing, trusting that your word, Holy God, never returns empty and your mercy never fails. We pray in the name of Jesus and by the power the Holy Spirit. Amen.