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The light breaking through the darkness symbolizes a universally human experience that can be interpreted through the narrative not only of Christendom but of many faiths.

# In the Face of Human Tragedy, a Call to Prayer and Action

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Days after the invasion of Ukraine, the Basilica of Saint Mary, Minneapolis, called the members of our community to prayer and action. On Sunday, February 27, the community gathered for Evening Prayer for Peace in Ukraine. The following Sunday the community gathered with our sisters and brothers from other Christian denominations for an Ecumenical Prayer for Peace in Ukraine. The weekly Stations of the Cross and the Friday celebration of the Eucharist were dedicated to peace in Ukraine and around the world. At the same time, our Christian life team prepared ways in which our community could respond to this crisis with concrete actions.

This call to prayer and action in response to a tragedy is not new to the community. As a community, we have a long-standing commitment to respond to local, national, and international crises with prayer and action. Unfortunately, new and urgent occasions for us to do so keep arising. The community gathered to face tragedy:

- On the evening of September 11, 2001, a diverse community filled the Basilica of Saint Mary to mourn and pray after planes had been flown into the World Trade Center in New York; the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia; and a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Shortly after realizing what had occurred, our staff gathered, connected with our interfaith partners, and created a service specific to the circumstances of the day. Senior

clergy from our neighboring houses of worship joined us that evening in prayer and supplication.

- On August 1, 2007, hours after the I-35 bridge over the Mississippi river in Minneapolis collapsed, people of all backgrounds gathered for an interfaith service in the Basilica of Saint Mary to mourn, to pray for those who had died, and to intercede for those who were hospitalized.

- When twenty-six people, mostly children, were killed in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut, on December 14, 2012, the community at the Basilica of Saint Mary gathered for prayer to mourn those we lost and to pray for those who were mourning. Simultaneously, our Christian Life team went to task combating the proliferation of guns and ending the pandemic of violence. Sadly, we have gathered in prayer numerous times since then to mourn the loss of people who had died due to gun violence.

- After the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020, the staff at the basilica once again asked what we, as the Catholic cathedral in Minneapolis, are called to do in response to the tragedy. How were we to respond meaningfully to the killing of George Floyd and the underlying sin of racism that has stained our society, our institutions, and even our church for so long. And once again, we concluded that Jesus tasked us do two things: to pray and to act. Our equity, diversity, and inclusion team prepared initiatives to engage our community in the task

of facing white supremacy and engaging in anti-racism work. Complementing those initiatives, the liturgy and music team created a series of prayer services entitled “Prayer for Justice and Reconciliation.”

These are but a handful of examples of times when tragedy begged for a meaningful response and we turned to prayer and action. At these times, we used the variety of ways that our Catholic tradition offers to prayerfully bring our needs and the needs of the world before our loving God.

## PRAYING FOR THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD DURING THE EUCHARIST

Whenever we gather for the celebration of the Eucharist, we are called to pray for the needs of the world. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 69, the universal prayer or prayer of the faithful during Mass offers an opportunity to pray for “the Church, for those who govern with authority over us, for those weighed down by various needs, for all humanity, and for the salvation of the whole world.” Though these prayers are to be inspired foremost by the liturgical season or feast and the readings for the day, they also need to respond to the specific needs of the times.

In addition to the universal prayer, the Eucharist offers other opportunities to highlight specific needs, including the selection of music, the readings, the preface for the Mass, or even the collects. In response to the war in Ukraine, the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, for example, provided sample intercessions, Mass texts, and music to be used at the discretion of the diocesan bishop.

## PRAYING FOR THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD: THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

The Liturgy of the Hours offers a framework for a prayer service to respond to a specific tragedy or a disaster. Sadly, the Liturgy of the Hours is not celebrated in many places, and not many people are familiar with this Catholic prayer tradition.

The overall liturgical desire of the Second Vatican Council was to revitalize the liturgy and to encourage a deeper and more active participation of the entire assembly. The hope was that this might be realized both for the celebration of the sacraments as well as for the Liturgy of the Hours. One might argue that this goal was attained when it comes to the sacraments; however, much work needs to be done in terms of the Liturgy of the Hours.

To date, few parishes gather for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, even though the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 100, calls on pastors “to see to it that the chief hours, especially vespers, are celebrated in common on Sundays and the more solemn feasts.” The constitution further states that lay people are to be encouraged to pray the office with the entire parish, with one another, or even individually.

The *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, 15–18, highlights the characteristics of the Liturgy of the Hours as two-

fold: praising God with the Church in heaven and petition and intercession. Thus, the Liturgy of the Hours allows for praise and adoration on the one hand and lament and supplication on the other hand. This is a perfect framework for the creation of prayer in response to a crisis. A liturgy using the framework of the Liturgy of the Hours also can be prepared to be accessible and welcoming to Christians from other denominations. With careful consideration, people from other faiths, particularly members of the great monotheistic religions (Judaism and Islam) may feel welcomed and included as well.

From the outset, it is important to distinguish between a service for our own Catholic community; an ecumenical service that includes representatives of Christian denominations; and an interfaith service that is intended for people of different faiths, first and foremost Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Prayer with our own Catholic community is, of course, the easiest of the three. Evening Prayer or Vespers lends itself particularly well as a prayer response to a tragedy because of the symbolism between darkness and light that is so prominent in that liturgy. When using the framework of Evening Prayer, the four principal elements that constitute the Liturgy of the Hours are to be considered:

- hymnody
- psalmody
- sacred Scripture
- prayers

The specifics of the tragedy—whether war, gun violence, racism, or natural disasters—will necessarily inform the selection of the hymn(s), psalm(s), Scripture reading(s), and prayers. At the same time, the specifics of the liturgical season, feast, and hour should also be taken into consideration.

A prayer service with other Christian denominations can also easily be realized as we share a common belief in the Triune God. The framework of the Liturgy of the Hours works well since several Christian denominations share this common prayer format, though with some variables.

Preparing a prayer service for people of different faiths is a bit more complex. Of course, when we pray with our Jewish and Muslim sisters and brothers we share our belief in the one God, Creator of the universe. This common belief is the basis for our shared prayer, but it is necessary to also keep in mind that some of our beliefs are very different from one another. When preparing an interfaith prayer service for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, we need to stay true to our beliefs while also respecting the belief of the other faith communities. Readings from the holy books from different traditions can be proclaimed by representatives of those traditions. Prayers from different traditions can be spoken by representatives of those traditions. If there is an expectation for all to sing or pray aloud together, the text needs to be such that everyone can faithfully pray or sing that text.



The music, the readings, the preface can highlight specific needs of the community and the world.

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In communities where a collaboration among different faith communities already exists, it is easier to come together in prayer and action when faced with a tragedy. Interfaith Thanksgiving services are a way to connect with neighboring houses of worship and build meaningful relationships.

There are some situations that invite us to pray with members of faith communities beyond the three Abrahamic religions. Years ago, for example, our local Tibetan monks asked to gather on International Human Rights Day to pray for the people of Tibet. Another occasion for an interfaith service was after the 2004 tsunami that hit Indonesia, the deadliest tsunami in recorded history. Though the population is predominantly Muslim, Indonesia also is home to Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. In such instances, it is important to find common ground; to respect one another's faith without a need to participate in it.

An example of such a broad interfaith prayer service was the World Day of Prayer for Peace on October 27, 1986, initiated by Pope John Paul II. The pope gathered representatives of Christian Churches, ecclesial communities, and world religions in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi "to witness before the world, each according to his own conviction, about the transcendent quality of peace." The prayers by the different representatives were offered side by side. The pope, then, was not praying together with a Hindu priest but rather the pope witnessed the prayer by the Hindu priest and acknowledged the shared goal for peace throughout the world.

In addition to carefully selected hymns, readings, and prayers, symbols such as the blessing of the light carry the potential to enhance prayer. The symbol of light breaking through the darkness is a universally human experience that can be interpreted through the narrative not only of Christianity but of many faiths.

At the Basilica of Saint Mary, candles are often lighted at the beginning of prayer, especially in the evening when we bless the light. Sometimes, the candles are lighted again at the end of the service so that participants can leave the church while carrying a candle. This is a powerful message—that we commit ourselves to bring light to a world often clad in darkness.

When preparing services, the community should keep in mind the preparation of the liturgical environment. When the Tibetan community asked the basilica to host an interfaith service on International Human Rights Day, observed annually on December 10, we pondered the decor. That year our Advent mobiles were constructed with hundreds of small square prayer flags inspired by Tibetan prayer flags. These prayer flags were in Advent colors, and our children inscribed each banner with their own prayers.

## **PRAYING FOR THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD: CATHOLIC DEVOTIONS**

In addition to the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, many other established prayer forms can be adapted to the needs of the time. Many people are praying a daily Rosary for peace in Ukraine. Pope Francis, together with the bishops and priests around the world, consecrated Russia and Ukraine to Mary on March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation. A traveling



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In the preparation of a service using the framework of the Liturgy of the Hours, the specifics of the tragedy—whether war, gun violence, racism, or natural disasters—will inform the selection of the hymns, psalms, Scripture readings, and prayers.

statue of Our Lady of Fatima has been processed around Ukraine. Since these are truly Catholic devotions, they are best suited for Catholics, but some devotions may speak to other Christians as well.

### **Stations of the Cross**

Another Catholic devotion suited to be prayed in the face of human suffering and injustice is the Stations of the Cross. This devotion allows participants to identify the suffering of Jesus with that of so many people in our world and thus to illuminate all human suffering. Given the Catholic nature of this devotion it is usually prayed with Catholics. Though Stations of the Cross are traditionally associated with Lent, they can be prayed throughout the year, especially on Fridays.

To make the Stations of the Cross more accessible to all Christians, Pope John Paul II in 1995 commissioned a new version. His set of stations, though true to the original intent of the devotion, are different in number and content. The scriptural stations inaugurated by Pope John Paul II relive the last moments in Jesus' life as they have been recorded in the Gospels, ending with the fifteenth station, the resurrection. Not only does this fifteenth station make sense of the suffering and death of Jesus, it offers hope in light of the specific tragedies or injustices we are considering.

At the Basilica of Saint Mary, we have celebrated the scriptural Stations of the Cross since the year 2000. To commemorate the beginning of the third Christian millennium, an abstract set of monoprints were commissioned from local artist Lucinda Naylor and master printer Steven Anderson based on the Scripture passage that inspired each station. A set of meditations was written for each of the stations based on Scripture and the monoprints.

During Lent of 2021 and again in 2022 the community at the basilica took a different approach as we meditated on a different set of the Stations of the Cross each Friday of Lent. Our goal was to respond to the many injustices that we face, such as war, racism, human trafficking, and ecological injustice.

To give three examples, one Friday we used the stations painted for Saint Augustine Cathedral in Lodwar, Kenya, by



local Turkana artists. These images were paired with a set of stations written by the Care of Creation Ministry at St. Eugene Parish in Asheville, NC, inspired by *Laudato si'* (*On Care for Our Common Home*), Pope Francis' encyclical.

Another Friday a series of Stations of the Cross painted by Janet McKenzie, an artist known for the diversity she brings to the representation of our Christian narrative, were prayed with the Stations for Overcoming Racism (originally written by Tom Faletti and prepared for St. Peter's Parish, Washington, DC, 2019, and adapted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020; these are downloadable at [stations-of-the-cross-overcoming-racism.pdf](#)).

When we used the Stations of the Cross painted in the Santero art tradition by Marie Romero Cash for the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe, we prayed the text from the *Stations of the Cross for Victims of Human Trafficking*, © USCCB/Migration and Refugee Services, Anti-Trafficking.

At the Last Supper, Jesus asked us to pray, act, and serve when he commissioned his followers to celebrate the Eucharist and to wash one another's feet. As Catholics, then, our prayer needs to focus outward to respond to the needs of the world and offer a corrective to the ills of our society. Our prayer should be in constant dialogue with society. When our prayer is in dialogue with society, it will serve as a solace to those who are suffering in our world and as a corrective to all that is wrong in our society. And when we pray intently and deeply, we will be moved to act and make a difference in our world.

## SAMPLE PRAYER SERVICES

The following are samples of prayer services prepared by the Basilica of Saint Mary staff. Parishes can use the outline of these services as models for prayer in their community during a crisis.

### Basilica Prayer for Peace in Ukraine

#### Procession

"Grant to us, O Lord, a Heart Renewed" (music by Lucien Deiss, CSSP; World Library Publications)

#### Liturgy of the Light

##### Opening Dialogue

From "Praise God in Song" (setting by J. Michael Joncas; GIA Publications)

##### Hymn to the Light

"God of Day and God of Darkness" (text by Marty Haugen, GIA Publications; tune by Teri Larson, the Basilica of Saint Mary, Minneapolis)

##### Evening Thanksgiving

(Text by Teri Larson, the Basilica of Saint Mary, Minneapolis; tune by Don Krubsack, composer-in-residence at the Basilica of Saint Mary, Minneapolis)

#### Psalmody

Psalm 72: "Justice Shall Flourish in His Time, and Fullness of Peace Forever" (text: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; tune by Don Krubsack, composer-in-residence at the Basilica of Saint Mary, Minneapolis)



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The Stations of the Cross can help communities focus on injustices, such as war, racism, human trafficking, and ecocide.

#### Psalm Prayer

Psalm 85: "Lord, Let Us See Your Kindness and Grant Us Your Salvation" (text: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; tune by Don Krubsack, composer-in-residence at the Basilica of Saint Mary, Minneapolis)

#### Psalm Prayer

Revelation Canticale: "I Saw the Holy City Coming Down out of Heaven" (text: Revelation 21:1-5a; tune by Don Krubsack, composer-in-residence at the Basilica of Saint Mary, Minneapolis)

#### The Word of God

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (2:2-5)

#### Responsory

"Pilgrim's Hymn," from the opera *The Three Hermits* (text by Michael Dennis Browne; music by Stephen Paulus)

Magnificat (text: the Revised Gail Psalms; tune by Don Krubsack, composer-in-residence at the Basilica of Saint Mary)

#### The Prayers

**Petitions** (multilingual setting by Mike Hay; GIA Publications)

#### The Lord's Prayer

#### Blessing and Sending

#### Recessional Hymn

"O Day of Peace" (text by Carl P. Daw Jr.; Hope Publishing Cie; tune: JERUSALEM, by Charles H. Parry)

### Ecumenical Evening Prayer for Peace in Ukraine

#### Procession

"Nada te turbe" (music by Jaques Berthier; GIA Publications)

## Liturgy of the Light

### Opening Dialogue

“Thanksgiving for Light” (from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*: Augsburg Fortress)

### Hymn to the Light

“Behold, Unveiled, the Vesper Skies” (text by Susan Palo Cherwien; music by David Cherwien; Augsburg Fortress)

### Blessing of the Light

### Psalmody

Psalm 141: “Let My Prayer Rise Before You as Incense” (by Rick Erickson, from *Psalm Settings for the Church Year*: Augsburg Fortress)

### Psalm Prayer

Psalm 46: “Go Alone be Praised” (text by Susan Briehl; music by Zebulon Highben; Augsburg Fortress)

### The Word of God

First reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah (30:8–11b, 15–17a)

### Responsory

Царю небесний, Kyvian—Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth!

Святий Боже—Trisagion

### Gospel according to Saint Luke (12:7–17)

### Homily

### Responsory

“Pilgrim’s Hymn” (from the opera *The Three Hermits*, text by Michael Dennis Browne; music by Stephen Paulus)

### Magnificat

Canticle of the Turning; (text by Rory Cooney; GIA Publications)

### The Prayers

#### Petitions

#### Marian Prayer

Під твою милість

#### Sub Tuum Praesidium

#### The Lord’s Prayer

### Lighting of Candles

“O God We Call” (text and music by Linnea Good; Borealis Music)

### Blessing

### Recessional

“When Our Song Says Peace” (text by Richard Leach; music by Tomas Pavlechko, Augsburg Fortress)

## Interfaith Thanksgiving Service

### Procession

“O God, Beyond all Praising” (text by Michael Perry; Hope Publishing Company; tune: THAXTED, by Gustave Holst)

### Opening dialogue and welcome

Offered by a Roman Catholic priest, host of the service

### Opening Prayer

Offered by a pastor of the Disciples of Christ

### Hymn to the Light

“The God of Abr’ham Praise” (text: Yigdal Elohim Hai; para by Thomas Olivers; tune: LEONI by Meyer Lyon adapted from Yigdal)

### The Word of God

A reading from the Jewish tradition (Isaiah 58:5–7)

Proclaimed in Hebrew and English by a rabbi

### Responsory

“Hymn to the Eternal Flame” (from *To Be Certain of the Dawn*; text by Michael Dennis Browne; music by Stephen Paulus)

### Reading

A reading from the Muslim tradition (Select verses from the Qur’an)

Proclaimed in Arabic and English by an imam

### Responsory

“Carol of the Stranger” (text by Michael Dennis Browne; music by Abbie Burtis Betinis)

### Reading

A reading from the Christian tradition (2 Corinthians 9:6–12)

Proclaimed by a Lutheran pastor

### Responsory

“You Are My Inheritance” (a setting of Psalm 16; tune by Don Krubsack, composer-in-residence at the Basilica of Saint Mary Minneapolis)

### Reflection 1

Offered by a pastor of the United Methodist Church

### Responsory

“Many and Great” (text: Wakantanka *tuku nitawa*; Dakota hymn; tune: LACQUIPARLE; Dakota Odowan; GIA Publications)

### Reflection 2

Offered by a pastor of the Presbyterian Church

### The Prayers

#### Petitions

Offered by an Episcopal priest

### The Prayers

#### Blessing

Offered by a Roman Catholic priest, host of the service

#### Recessional

“This Is My Song” (verses 1 and 2) (text by Lloyd Stone; tune: FINLANDIA) ◆

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