



**Co-chairs Eilise Rouse and Dave McCarraher**

**Prayer Vigil to Mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “I Have a Dream”  
speech of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., August 28, 1963  
and the Feast Day of Saint Augustine  
Sunday, August 27, 2023, from 6-7 p.m., Rosemont Chapel**

**Additional resources, prayers and reflections**

- A Prayer for Racial Justice
- Prayer to Heal Racial Division
- Marian Prayer to Overcome Racism
- I Seek Forgiveness and Reconciliation to Act Justly
- Prayer To End Racism
- Communal Reflection Questions
- Witness statement from parishioner Stephen Sammut
- Text of “I Have A Dream” speech delivered by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in front of the Lincoln Memorial on the national mall in Washington, D.C. USA August 28, 1963

## **A Prayer for Racial Justice**

*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. (John 14:27 NRSV)*

Heavenly Father, we know that You are the Source of the peace that passes understanding. In these troubled times, give us understanding minds and hearts as we listen to the cries of the oppressed, the wounded, the confused, and even to the voices of those with whom we disagree. Give us the wisdom to respond with Your Truth, offering words and actions that build up instead of tear down.

Across the nation, racism casts a long shadow. We believe that all life is sacred and worthy of our deepest reverence. Give us the courage to stand up for racial justice and reconciliation. As individuals, as a ministry, and as a nation, help us to see when we have missed the mark and empower us to do better.

Root up any violence or malice within our hearts and minds and transform it into love, a love of neighbor and a rightly ordered love of self. Let us work for peace and be peace to one another and the people we serve. Amen.

## **Prayer to Heal Racial Division**

We thank you, O Lord,  
For in your loving wisdom  
You created one human family  
With a diversity  
That enriches our communities.

We pray to you, O Lord,  
That we always recognize  
each member of this human family  
As being made in your image and beloved by you,  
With worth and dignity.

We pray to you, O Lord,  
That we may envision a way forward  
To heal the racial divisions  
That deny human dignity and  
the bonds between all human beings.

We pray to you, O Lord  
That we may affirm each person's dignity  
Through fair access for all  
To economic opportunity, housing,  
Education, and employment.

We pray to you, O Lord,  
That we may have eyes to see  
What is possible when we reach out  
Beyond fear, beyond anger,  
To hold the hand of our sisters, our brothers.

We thank you, O Lord,  
For your call and challenge to us  
That we may reveal your teachings and your love  
Through our actions to end racism  
And to proclaim that we are all your children,  
heirs to your sacred creation. Amen.

### **Marian Prayer to Overcome Racism**

Mary, friend and mother to all,  
through your Son, God has found a way  
to unite himself to every human being,  
called to be one people,  
sisters and brothers to each other.

We ask for your help in calling on your Son,  
seeking forgiveness for the times when  
we have failed to love and respect  
one another.

We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son  
the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism  
and to build a just society.

We ask for your help in following your Son,  
so that prejudice and animosity  
will no longer infect our minds or hearts  
but will be replaced with a love  
that respects the dignity of each person.

Mother of the Church,  
the Spirit of your Son Jesus  
warms our hearts:  
pray for us.  
Amen.

### **I Seek Forgiveness and Reconciliation to Act Justly**

It is written in Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Pope Francis reminds us that the Lord "calls each of us by our name: he knows us by name; he looks at us; he waits for us; he forgives us; he is patient with us." [5]

Receiving God's grace and forgiveness requires a response. Pope Francis encourages the believer: "Whoever experiences Divine mercy is impelled to be an architect of mercy among the least and the poor." [6] Now let us do what God requires:

"Only to do justice and to love goodness  
and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

### **Prayer To End Racism**

O Lord our God, in your mercy and kindness, no thought of ours is left unnoticed, no desire or concern ignored. You have proven that blessings abound when we fall on our knees in prayer, and so we turn to you in our hour of need.

Surrounded by violence and cries for justice, we hear your voice telling us what is required, "Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi 6:8). Fill us with your mercy so that we, in turn, may be merciful to others.

Strip away pride, suspicion, and racism so that we may seek peace and justice in our communities. Strengthen our hearts so that they beat only to the rhythm of your holy will. Flood our path with your light as we walk humbly toward a future filled with encounter and unity.

Be with us, O Lord, in our efforts, for only by the prompting of your grace can we progress toward virtue. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Communal Reflection Questions**

How can we reach out beyond our level of comfort to meet and learn about others, hear their stories and be open to their full humanity?

How can we bring diversity and respect for others into our prayers, our worship celebrations and our holy days and holidays?

## **Witness statement from parishioner Stephen Sammut**

In August 1963 I was 12 years old. My father was recovering from a heart attack in the hospital when my Uncle Edward asked my mother if he could take me to DC for the day. I was so excited to be with my Uncle and to travel by train from Manhattan (yes, the fading days of the old Penn Station). My Uncle had been a Salesian Missionary in Thailand for over a decade until Malaria overtook him and he came home permanently. He was my role model for compassion and a relationship with Christ. In any case, this was August 28. I had no idea what was going on and it didn't register at the time, but I was present, **standing at** the end of the reflecting pond at the Lincoln Memorial, when Dr. King said the words that echo in our conscience. A year later I started high school and I gradually appreciated that I was present at the most poignant moment in the Civil Rights movement and began to comprehend the power of the words. When Dr. King was killed near the end of my senior year in high school. I was totally devastated. In some ways, I'm still recovering.

This is truly a moment for reflection.

**Text of “I Have A Dream” speech delivered by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in front of the Lincoln Memorial on the national mall in Washington, D.C. USA August 28, 1963**

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check.

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men — yes, Black men as well as white men — would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds.

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.

We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.

Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. 1963 is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.

And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back.

There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, when will you be satisfied? We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police

brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: for whites only.

We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our Northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.



I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama little Black boys and Black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning: My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that, let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, Black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will

be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last. Free at last.  
Thank God almighty, we are free at last.