

As Far as It Depends on You, Be at Peace with All People

worship leader's guide for a service of peace

Note: This is a suggested service of peace, prepared to coincide with August 6 and August 9, the 60th anniversary of the bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We urge you to adapt these resources and suggestions to the needs and abilities of your congregation. Although the service is compiled with those two anniversaries in mind, we have endeavored to create it to be used at other times and in various ways.

If you choose to ask your children to chime the hour of worship, you will need a small handbell for each child who participates, or you will need some of the miniature bells used by some congregations on Easter Sunday.

Place a white candle in the middle of the altar table. (If it is possible and appropriate, consider using the Christ candle from your 2004 Advent wreath.) It will be lit during the musical invocation.

For the healing ceremony at the end of the service, you will need a number of large bowls filled with water, a quantity of small floating candles, and about a dozen blossoms—or more, according to your preferences. You have many choices. Perhaps a particular flower is meaningful to your congregation. Or you might choose to select a colorful variety. The blossoms should be shallow and wide (daisies, for instance, would have the right shape), so that they will float. You will need to cut the stems off quite close to the blossoms.

You should have enough floating candles on hand for people to come and light as the symbol of a wound or conflict for which they will pray for healing. Gather the candles in baskets and place the baskets in several places at the front of the worship area.

Place the bowls around the center of the front. Six to eight would probably be enough, depending on the size of the congregation. Some of them could be on the altar table, and some on steps to the dais, if you have steps. If bending might be a problem for participants, consider placing a few small tables on either side of the altar to hold the bowls. If coming forward may be difficult for some, alert a few congregants to look for this possibility and to offer to light the candle for them.

Depending on how many people you expect to participate, you might want to position another standing candle on each side of the front, or one next to each basket of floating candles. The people will light the floating candles from the standing candles and place them on the water in the bowls.

Prelude

Suggested music: “Sheep May Safely Graze” or “Arioso” by J. S. Bach

Meditation of Preparation

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. It is a direction which immediately suggests a question that has all the energy of a challenge, specifically, “How much does it depend on me?” To live at peace? To be a peacemaker? Have I done enough? Have I availed myself of the disciplines that could transform my capacities and commitments to respond to conflict in hopeful and not hostile ways. The whole passage assumes the possibility, if not probability, that Christians will find the world in conflict with them—because they have

given themselves into a new community where class distinctions and assumptions of privilege, possession and priority have been relinquished, “counted as refuse,” before the riches of the Gospel.

—Dwight Lundgren

Chiming of the Hour

You may choose to ask some of your children to chime the hour for worship by ringing small bells (like the ones used by some congregations on Easter Sunday) or handbells. Ask them to move quietly during the stand across the front of the worship area.

Musical Invocation

Suggested music: a small ensemble singing “Dona Nobis Pacem” a Capella

Alternative: Depending on the musical style of your congregation, you might also consider playing Kate Campbell’s “Peace Comes Stealing Slow” from her newest CD, Blues and Lamentations (www.largerivermusic.com or www.katecampbell.com.)

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Light the white candle on the altar. You might ask one of the children to do this before he/she leaves the front.

Call to Worship

LEADER: To the God of majesty we pray today;

WOMEN: Who made the gardens bloom with colors rich and bright;

YOUTH: Who made the seasons in their change;

MEN: Who crafted the mountains and the seas;

ALL: Open our eyes to the splendor of our world.

LEADER: To the God of hope we pray today;

YOUTH: Who created the peoples of the earth;

MEN: Who invites us to reach out to each other;

WOMEN: Who calls on us to care for the helpless;

ALL: Open our hearts to the pain in our world.

LEADER: To the God of grace we pray today;

WOMEN: Our petitions for the wounded of our world;

MEN: Our confessions for neglect and prejudice;

YOUTH: Our cries for peace, within and without;

ALL: Heal us, and heal our world.

LEADER: Help us to be true to ourselves, while loving each other,

YOUTH: Even when we get on each other’s nerves.

WOMEN: Help us to care for each other,

MEN: Those sitting next to us now, and those halfway across the globe;

LEADER: We lift up our gifts to you today, our talents and our visions;

ALL: We lift up our hopes for a day of peace. Amen.

—Katie Cook

Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 65:17-25

Find readers for both Spanish and English.

Hymn

“Give Peace in These Our Days”

Words: Wolfgang Kopfel 1533, trans. Edmund Grindal 1561

Music: Thomas Ravencroft 1621

*See other hymn suggestions below.**

Words for Meditation

By living with the question of how much the peace of my neighborhood, my community, my country, and even my world depend on me, the Christian and Citizen sets an example of not foreclosing the struggle to live at peace and for peace. Our minds naturally go to the present war in Iraq, the attendant struggle against terrorism, the dynamics of an epoch that makes of all nations neighborhoods. There are other momentous challenges to peace, challenges which have the potential to wreak greater, even more enduring havoc.

The elimination of nuclear weapons, the rejection of a policy that entertains such weapons as a privileged national option—these commitments

press upon us in a day in which the reversal of the nuclear threat is seriously threatened. For the moral imagination inspired by the love of God in Jesus Christ, the only “coals of fire” that are to be heaped on the heads of the enemy (Romans 12:20) are the acts of kindness and mercy that anticipate and invoke a life together in God’s Shalom.

—Dwight Lundgren

Reading from the Gospels

John 14: 18-27

Find readers for both Spanish and English.

Prayer for Discernment

Congregation prays together:

Most high and glorious God,
Bring light to the darkness of my soul.
Give me right faith, certain hope,
And perfect charity.

Lord, give me insight and wisdom,
So I might always discern
Your holy and true will.

—St. Francis of Assisi

Note: Another meaningful way of presenting this prayer would be to play John Michael Talbot’s “Prayer for Guidance” from Troubadour of the Great King (www.johnmichaeltalbot.com.)

Reading from the Epistles

Romans 12:14-21

Find readers for both Spanish and English.

Hymn

“O God of Love, O King of Peace”

Words and Music: Henry Baker, 1861

From *A Hymnal for Use in the English Church*, 1866

Sermon

“We’re All in This Together”

by Larry Bethune

Ceremony of Healing

You might choose to wait until time for the healing ceremony to pour water into the bowls. This could be symbolic of life-giving water, or of baptismal water. Also, this ceremony will be more striking if you lower the lights in the worship area. If you are using other standing candles, light them now from the Christ candle.

Ask some of the children or youth to be ready to come forward with the blossoms in baskets at this point. Instruct them to place the blossoms on the water in the bowls as one of them reads the following poem:

Peace Flowers

If I were a flower
My spores would be so light and airy
They would travel across the world,
Leaving no place without
The beautiful peace flowers,
Thus brightening all of the world.
I would be so hardy
That I could grow anywhere
With little water, or sunlight, or care.
My colors would change over and over
Until every imaginable color
Had been revealed in my flower blooming.
Each flower would change to many shapes
and colors.



The fragrance and beauty would be so wonderful
That no person could think any negative thoughts,
Hence the name, Peace Flowers,
Helping to bring about world peace.

—Mitchell Nicola Dean

Next, invite those who wish to come forward and take a floating candle from one of the baskets, to light it, and place it on the water in one of the bowls. (This is an adaptation of a tradition from Hiroshima, in which people place paper lanterns in a body of water as a symbol of their prayers for victims.) Some of them might wish to step to a microphone or face the congregation and speak a name or phrase aloud before they place the candle in the water. Others will probably choose not to say anything. You might have quiet music playing—hymns or songs that congregants will recognize by their tunes—while the people come forward. A solo acoustic guitar, piano, or organ would be appropriate. A CD with classical music or music for meditation and the sound of ocean waves might also be effective.

Benediction

After all who wish to participate have done so, offer the following benediction and ask them to leave the worship area in silence.

God, grant us peace. Whatever bitterness we hold towards another human being, let us give that up into your hands now. Whatever enmity poisons our hearts, let us release into the cross of Christ. Whatever guilt clouds our judgment, whatever grief grips our souls, whatever past corrupts the present, help us be freed from it by your forgiveness. Let the peace that passes understanding well up from within our souls and spread within our families and associations and communities until through us you touch the world with peace, in the name of Christ. Amen.

—Larry Bethune

***Other Hymns:**

“O God of Love, Grant Us Your Peace”

Words: John A. Dallas 1985

Music: Forest Green (traditional English melody)

Arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906

“Lord, Grant Your Peace”

Words & Music: Kenneth O. Turley, 2002

(Ken Turley, 8 Elm St., Fryeburg, ME 04037)



About the Contributors:

- **Larry Bethune** is the senior pastor at the University Baptist Church in Austin, Texas. The benediction is taken from a sermon titled “Is Peace Possible?”
- **Katie Cook** is the editor for the Seeds of Hope publications Sacred Seasons and Hunger News & Hope, and also the editor of Baptist Peacemaker, the journal/newspaper of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. She compiled this worship service.
- **Mitchell Nicola Dean**, the artist and writer who wrote the poem “Peace Flowers,” describes himself as part Cherokee, part Mayan, and also part Irish and Lebanese and Mexican. He lives in Sparrowhawk Village, near Tahlequah, Oklahoma.
- **Dwight Lundgren** is the Coordinator of Intercultural Ministries and Reconciliation for the American Baptist Churches USA. He works in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.
- The Prayer for Discernment is one of the prayers referred to as a “Prayer Before the Cross” by **St. Francis of Assisi**. Most scholars consider it to be a prayer that he prayed before the icon of Jesus on the cross, in the chapel at San Damiano, near Assisi.