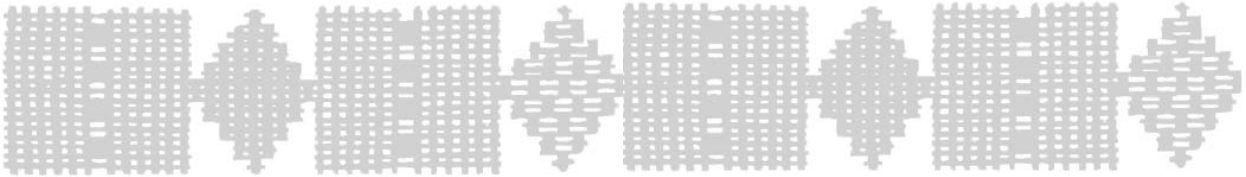


WOMEN'S SERVICE: EVENING PRAYER AND BLESSING

XII

This prayer service is a variation on the traditional vespers service. It includes psalms, sacred songs, Scripture readings and a blessing. The entire service honors the women of the assembly, but it is neither necessary nor appropriate that only women participate in it. Men may be selected to be readers or to offer some of the prayers. Women should preside and provide the focus of the service and be responsible for the music.

EVENING PRAYER: “THE DAUGHTERS OF HAGAR, THE SISTERS OF MAGDALENE”



Song: “I Love the Lord, He Heard My Cry”

Presider: We gather to honor our community by entering into a reflection on the role of our Black mothers, daughters, sisters, companions on our faith journey.
From Hagar to Lyddia, from Magdalene to Monica, the holy women of Scripture and history have served as models for us all.
On this occasion we will remember how they opened themselves in faith to be forever changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and how their lives, their faithfulness, their wisdom and their prophetic witness have strengthened the family, the community and the church.

Reading: Genesis 16:5–11

Prayer: Almighty God, you love us as a mother loves her child.
You name us all in our mother’s womb.
You count us more precious than gold.
When we have been lost and abandoned, you have reminded us that we hold on to your unchanging hand, that you are a rock in a weary land, a shelter from all harm.
We gather here to remember all the ways that women have been the vessels of your love, the recipients of your word and the beneficiaries of your power.

Help us to honor ourselves, to respect one another and to care for all who are precious mothers and sisters and daughters and companions of our hearts.

Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God, and the mother of us all, we offer our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus, your only begotten son.

Amen.

Psalm: *Divide the assembly in two sections and pray Psalm 111 aloud:*

Group I: Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.

Group II: Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

Group I: He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.
He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.

Group II: The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.
They are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

Group I: He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name.

Group II: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.

Groups I and II: His praise endures forever.

Song: "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

Reading:

What does it mean to be black and Catholic? It means that I come to my church fully functioning. That doesn't frighten you, does it? I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become, I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African-American song and dance and gestures and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as a gift to the church.¹²

Song: "Spirit of the Living God, Fall Fresh on Me"

Reading: Acts 16:11–15

Song: "Near to the Heart of God"

Reading: John 20:11–18

Reflection**Blessing:**

Select four young children—two boys and two girls—to carry bowls of water and branches and move among the assembly, sprinkling those gathered with water, while the blessing prayer is spoken. Select four young adults to pray the final blessing.

Young Adult I: We know our mothers have magnified the Lord; we know how they have taught us to rejoice in God who has been their savior. We ask that the favor of God continually rains down upon them, so they may find the strength and grace to nurture all who are placed in their hands and hearts.

Young Adult II: We raise our voices with the voices of generations yet unborn, to ask that our sisters be protected from harm, from abuse, from neglect; may they be healed in mind, body and soul of whatever afflictions and trials may befall them. We ask that the mercy of God be poured forth on all our sisters, here and throughout the world.

Young Adult III: We remember Deborah and Judith, Naomi and Ruth, Elizabeth, Mary and Martha, and the women at the tomb.

We offer a prayer of thanksgiving for all the women among us who have labored long and hard in the vineyard of the kingdom, in the kitchens and nurseries and classrooms of our community, who have made a way out of no way, providing miracles of love every day.

We ask that the joy of Mary be their inheritance.

Young Adult IV: We ask that prayers of the ancestors, known and unknown, surround us in a cloud of blessing as we stand in this place and honor the women of our world who strive for justice, who cry for peace, who hunger for the welfare of all children.

We remember the holy women who took their place in the struggles of yesterday and ask that we be inspired by their lives and hold their vision of a beloved community dear to our hearts.

We ask that the ancestors look kindly upon us and bless us now and all our days.

Presider: May Almighty God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless us and keep us.

Song: "Soon and Very Soon" or "It Is Well With My Soul"

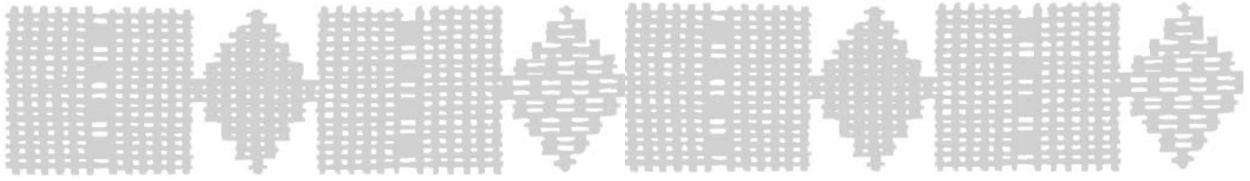
MEN'S SERVICES

XIII

These services and prayers can be adapted to a variety of circumstances. In the tradition of the seventy-two elders gathered around the tent where the Tablets of the Law were kept, these rituals focus on a renewal of the covenant of men as leaders in the faith community. Therefore, mission, evangelization and stewardship are the themes emphasized in these services.

The "Covenant Statement" (page 77) can be used independently or in conjunction with other services.

MEN'S DAY SERVICE



Song: "We've Come This Far by Faith"

Leader: *Strong drumbeat accompanies the opening statement.*

The drum beats the welcome...the welcome to celebration.
The drum beats the welcome to all men of African descent.
The drum beats the welcome, uniting us all, uniting us in spirit.
The drum beats the welcome.

A stronger beat erupts.

Let the celebration begin.

Procession:

Lectors and ministers enter, with acolytes, crucifix and incense, accompanied by drums or the singing of "Come Out of the Wilderness."

Leader: Our ancestors taught us that we do not die until our names are forever forgotten.
It is up to us, the living, to see to it that those who have gone before us are never forgotten.
We pause now to call upon the Spirit of God, uniting us with the saints, those great men and women who have now gone to glory.

Assembly recalls aloud the names of ancestors.

I drink now from the cup symbolizing our unity.
May we all be reminded of our oneness and our interdependence.
May we never forget that "I am because we are, and we are because I am."

I now pour a libation in honor of our ancestors, as a reminder that they are present with us, nourishing us, encouraging us. It is upon their shoulders that we stand. It is because of their faith and their determination to “make a way out of no way” that we are now able to gather here, on holy ground, and celebrate the goodness of God.

Pause a moment for silent reflection.

Leader: In union with God’s spirit and the spirits of our ancestors, we open our hearts and minds to receive the Word of God.

First Reading (Youth): Jeremiah 1:31–34

Second Reading (Young Adult): Hebrews 8:6–13

Third Reading (Elder): Luke 4:16–21

Renewal of the Covenant

Leader: The response to the petitions is: “Lord, anoint us with the spirit of our ancestors.”

Youth: O Lord our God, under the shadow of your wings we have found refuge, strength and hope.
We know that you are with us today, just as you were present with those gone before us, those upon whose shoulders we now stand.

All: Lord, anoint us with the spirit of our ancestors.

Young Adult: You were with our ancestors as they journeyed to this land; their strength they gained from you.
You were with the generations who sojourned in tough times and rough places, their hope in you becoming a rock and safety for them.

All: Lord, anoint us with the spirit of our ancestors.

Elder: Lord, we call upon you to do for us today what you did for others in the past:
Lead us, your people, through this new place and time.
Bless the work of those assembled here.

Give us the unity and power you gave Joshua and the children of Israel when they confronted Jericho.
Help us level the mountains of oppression we still face, and show us how to make the crooked places straight.

All: Lord, anoint us with the spirit of our ancestors.

Youth, Young Adult and Elder:

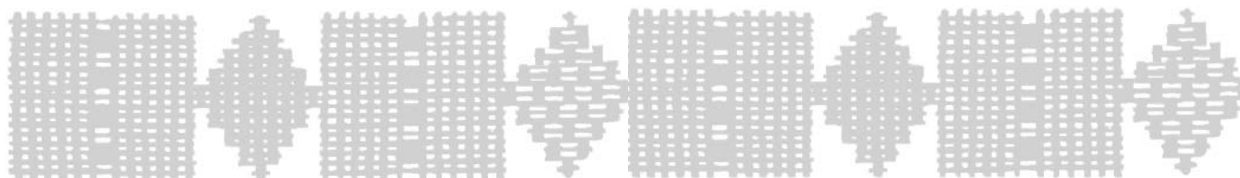
Guide our feet to where you want us to be and unite us in our struggle. May we be strengthened in our faith and secure in your promise that "the lame shall walk, the blind shall see, and the captives shall be set free."

All: Lord, anoint us with the spirit of our ancestors. This we ask in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Closing Prayer: Lord, you are generous. Gift us with the wisdom and the understanding of our ancestors, so that we might accomplish the goals we set today.
Let your Spirit fill our lives and let the spirits of our ancestors help us to go forward.
Help us to love as Jesus loved.
Grant us the confidence we will need to rid our church, our community and our world of violence and injustice.
Give us the grace to do what is required of us: to do justly, to love mercifully and to walk humbly with you, O God.
In the name of your Son, our brother Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever.
Amen.

Song: "Sign Me Up"

MEN'S DAY OF RECOLLECTION



MORNING PRAYER SERVICE

Song: "Let It Breathe on Me"

Presider: We gather our minds and hearts in this morning prayer.
We join with believers around the world and throughout time
remembering who we are and whose we are.
Let us now pray Psalm 137:1–6 (NRSV), alternating sides of
the room.

Divide the assembly into sections to pray Psalm 137 aloud "in choir."

Group I: By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our harps.

Group II: For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

Group I: How could we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!

Group II: Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

Prayer: *Presider offers a prayer appropriate to the setting.*

Reading: Luke 7:24–28

Reflection

Shared Introduction:

Ask each participant to introduce himself to the circle of retreatants. While the song “Let It Breathe” is playing, ask each retreatant to reflect silently on the question: What do I ask the Spirit of God to touch in me today?

Closing Prayer (All):

Almighty God, you have formed each of us in our mother’s womb,
held us in your embrace and named us as your child.

Be with us today, as we join your Son, Jesus.

We have “parted from the crowds, to pray awhile,” as he directed
his disciples.

We ask that you pour forth your spirit upon us,
that we might remember our homeland of the soul,
that we might be refreshed at the fountain of your grace,
that we might see the visions that you have prepared for us.

We are in a quiet place that we might hear your voice
and follow where you lead.

Amen.

Song: “Soon and Very Soon”

EVENING PRAYER SERVICE

Song: “Every Time I Feel the Spirit”

Presider: Let us pray aloud together Psalm 23.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Reading: John 17:1–19

Reflection

Shared Reflection/Prayer:

Ask each participant to share three prayers with the gathering. Participants go around the circle three times, once for each set of prayers. At the beginning of each cycle of prayer, the presider says:

Presider: First Prayer: We pray for the needs of the world.
Second Prayer: We pray for our people, our families.
Third Prayer: We pray for ourselves.

Final Blessing:

As the song “This Little Light of Mine” is played, bless each participant with oil. When the blessing is finished, ask participants to join in saying the Covenant Statement (page 77).

Song: “This Little Light of Mine”