



Voices for Justice Prayer Vigil Guide



Introduction and rationale

Prayer itself is a form of advocacy. When we pray, we cry out from the depths of our hearts to the God of grace and justice. If we define advocacy as speaking to the powerful on behalf of the powerless then we must certainly speak to the most Powerful God. Both prayer and action are essential components of Christian advocacy.

We are called to pray for all our leaders and for their work in governing the nation. We are also called to pray for our own nation and the way it helps or hinders God's work of peace, mercy, and justice in the wider community of nations.

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity."

1 Timothy 2:1–2



Outline of the Vigil

The Vigil is organised around four key “moments”:

1 Prayer for the Church

2 Prayer for our leaders

3. Prayer for our nation

4. Prayer for the world

Each “moment” includes:

- ▶ One or more Bible readings
- ▶ Prayer led by someone in the congregation
- ▶ A time of personal reflection and prayer

More detail and resources for each of these moments are included below.

Optional resources

- ▶ Cross, or crucifix
- ▶ Tea light candles
- ▶ Large world map (printed, or painted onto canvas)
- ▶ Power point slides or posters of Australian politicians

Gathering

As you gather together, take the time to explain the reason for the Vigil, describe Voices for Justice and give a brief outline of the structure of the Vigil. This will enable your participants to have a greater sense of the purpose and focus of your time together.

Explain the reason for the Vigil

We are gathered together to pray as part of a larger gathering of Christians across Australia, raising our voices together. This is one of many Vigils taking place this weekend in conjunction with the Micah Challenge Prayer Vigil taking place on the lawns of Parliament House as part of Voices for Justice.

We are gathering to pray, seeking justice for our global community and guidance for Australia's contribution to a world free from poverty, and to call for our nation to be a good neighbour in the community of nations.

We are gathered together in prayerful hope and celebration for all that has been achieved in alleviating the impacts of poverty, in restoring peace and flourishing communities. We are thankful for the children receiving education, babies born in safe conditions after women have had safer pregnancies, the reduction in preventable deaths and disease, as well as the increase in access to safe water and sanitation.

And yet...

We gather to pray as we call out to God in deep anguish and grief knowing that in all these areas and more, there is so much to be done. We gather to pray for our own nation's response and our leaders who are tasked with overseeing this. Although there are more and more Christians supporting agencies which do valuable work in long term development, we know we need more than generous individuals. We need our governments to respond with generosity and justice to the needs of the poor – it is our responsibility as a wealthy nation. We know from history that advocacy can be effective and those who are involved in it ought to be persistent. Proverbs 25:15 reminds us that "through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone."

(Please see attached sheet for global poverty statistics to refer to if desired. This could also be displayed for personal reflection).

Describe Voices for Justice

Since 2006, Voices for Justice has been Micah Challenge's national worship and lobbying event in Canberra. It aims to equip Christians for speaking out on issues of injustice and influence our nation's leaders on Australia's response to global poverty. Voices for Justice is a unique and powerful opportunity for Christians to gather with like-minded advocates, meet their MP and state Senators, and head home with tools and networks to continue on their advocacy journey. The four day program includes advocacy training, theological teaching, worship, prayer, lobbying, events at Parliament House, workshops, political forums, kids and youth program and more.

Outline the structure of the Vigil

Explain that you will be praying together in four key areas and describe any creative actions you will take as part of the Vigil.

Moment 1: Prayer for the Church

Themes:

- ▶ Prayer for unity of the church.
- ▶ Asking for Jesus' spirit of grace, mercy and self-giving love to be present in the church and to flow out from us into our communities and the world.

Outline:

- ▶ Community gathers before the cross, lights candles
- ▶ Scripture reading
- ▶ Prayer
- ▶ Time of individual prayer and reflection

Suggested Scripture readings:

Philippians 2:1–13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Prayer for the church

(contributed by Rob Floyd, National Director for UnitingWorld)

Gracious and loving God,

Thank you that in Jesus Christ, our Lord, we experience your grace, your mercy and your self-giving love.

We remember Jesus' compassion for the least, the poorest, the marginalised.

We recall Jesus' passion for justice and fullness of life for all people

We remember Jesus' prayer that all who believe may be one.

We pray for your church, the body of Christ in the world, your hands, your feet, your ears, your voices.

May we your church, your people, living and responding in unity and in love, reach out to the world.

Help us to reach out to all people, bringing about Jesus promise of abundant life..

Inspire and empower us by your Spirit that we work together to bring justice, mercy, hope and life to all your people throughout your world.

Loving and merciful God, we bring this prayer to you, trusting in your power to heal and restore, to strengthen and unite, to embolden and to send out.

We pray in the name of Jesus, the source of our life and hope,

Amen

Moment 2: Prayer for our nation's leaders

Themes:

- ▶ Prayer for our nation's leaders.
- ▶ Asking for the wisdom, grace and guidance for our politicians to ensure that defence of the rights of the poor is an utmost priority in how they govern.

Outline:

- ▶ Scripture reading
- ▶ Prayer
- ▶ Photos of politicians are projected onto a screen or people gather around posters with their photos (ppt and images are downloadable as part of this kit)
- ▶ Time of individual prayer and reflection

Suggested Scripture readings:

Jeremiah 22:15–16

Are you a king because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well.
Is not this to know me? says the LORD.

Proverbs 31:8–9

An oracle that his mother taught to King Lemuel:
Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Prayer for our leaders

(contributed by The Right Reverend Doctor Stephen Pickard, Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture)

Loving and just God you hold the peoples of Australia in the palm of your hands; your good and Holy Spirit hovers over the nation and its leaders in many walks of life.

You know the great challenges before us as a people; you know our need for your powerful wisdom. We especially ask your grace and wisdom for those who govern our country.

There are so many temptations to pursue self interest and party interest before the greater common good. But now is the time for your love and mercy to move among our leaders; now is the time for a new day when your just and true ways are honoured.

Now is the time for your Spirit to move upon our leaders to open their eyes to the poor, the powerless, the despised and scorned. Lord give to our leaders eyes to see those in need and the courage to pursue the common good. May they inspire us all to live as true servants of Christ.

Moment 3: Prayer for our nation

Themes:

- ▶ Prayer for Australia and its role in the community of nations.
- ▶ Asking for justice and righteousness to exalt our nation, and for sins such as greed, indifference and injustice to be restrained.
- ▶ Asking God to help Australia make a powerful contribution to a world free from poverty.

Outline:

- ▶ Scripture reading
- ▶ Prayer
- ▶ Time of individual prayer and reflection

Suggested Scripture readings:

Luke 10:29–37

But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

He said, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Proverbs 14:31–34

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him. The wicked are overthrown by their evildoing, but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity. Wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding, but it is not known in the heart of fools. Justice exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

Prayer for our nation

(contributed by James Condon, Commissioner, Australian Eastern Territory, Salvation Army)

Our Father in Heaven, I thank you for this land in which we are privileged to live - Australia - the great Southland of the Holy Spirit. You have blessed us with an abundance of resources and we live in freedom.

We confess to you that we are reliant on you for everything and yet at times our nation is plagued by selfishness, greed and self-entitlement. Please forgive us.

Please help us all to respect each other and show grace to all peoples who choose to live in our nation. Help us to seek your grace to show mercy and justice to all and be the catalyst to help relieve suffering of all kinds in our world.

In Christ's name we pray.

Moment 4: Prayer for the world

Themes:

- ▶ Prayer for the nations of the world.
- ▶ Asking for God to be with those who suffer poverty and injustice.
- ▶ Prayer that all nations and communities will hear the cries of the poor and respond with action to tackle poverty and its root causes.

Outline:

- ▶ Scripture reading
- ▶ Prayer
- ▶ World Map is laid out on the floor and, as an act of prayer, people lay their tealight candle on a country or part of the world they wish to hold up in prayer
- ▶ Time of individual prayer and reflection

Suggested Scripture readings

Job 24:1–12

Why are times not kept by the Almighty, and why do those who know him never see his days? The wicked remove landmarks; they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the donkey of the orphan; they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They thrust the needy off the road; the poor of the earth all hide themselves.

Like wild asses in the desert they go out to their toil, scavenging in the wasteland food for their young. They reap in a field not their own and they glean in the vineyard of the wicked. They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for want of shelter.

There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast, and take as a pledge the infant of the poor. They go about naked, without clothing; though hungry, they carry the sheaves; between their terraces they press out oil; they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst. From the city the dying groan, and the throat of the wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer.

Psalms 146:5–9

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow

Prayer for the nations

(contributed by Rev Dr Graham Hill, Morling College and the GlobalChurch Project)

Lord Jesus, we pray for the nations of the world. We pray for your hand to be on the nations—bringing good governance, wise leadership, economic justice, political stability, peace and justice and reconciliation. We pray that wars would end, ethnic hatreds be tamed, politicians provide ethical leadership, good governance be restored, ecological restoration start, global warming halted, injustices righted, and poverty and disease reduced (and eventually eradicated).

We pray that you would be with those who suffer poverty and injustice. We pray for those who struggle each day to survive—afflicted by wars, poverty, injustices, and economic conditions beyond their control. Be with them, through your Spirit, and in the actions of your church. Give them strength to meet each day and hope for a different future.

We pray that all nations and communities will hear the cries of the poor and respond with action to tackle poverty and its root causes. We pray for the people and groups campaigning for the eradication of poverty. Father, be with those who are seeking change to unjust social structures, flawed political systems, and harmful economic policies.

Lord Jesus, we ask that governments, religious groups, non-government organisations, and other groups would work together for fair trade, human rights, an end to debt, and other expressions of a just, prosperous, harmonious, compassionate, and peaceful society.

We pray for the leaders of our government. Please give them the courage, conviction and passion to adequately address poverty and injustice. Help them to advocate for the poor, to promote just policies, to resist self-interest and complacency and to govern in righteous ways. Bless them with integrity, wisdom and courage. May they make wise and just choices for the good of all people.

Lord Jesus, we offer up the nations of the world to you. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Conclusion

Wrap up prayer and thank participants for joining the Prayer Vigil. Remind one another that Christian advocacy is expressed in prayer and action and that though we leave tonight, we leave to be those called to lives enriched by prayer and acting out justice, mercy and abiding love.

Follow up

To help raise awareness of your advocacy through prayer we encourage you to share a photo of the Prayer Vigil on social media using the hashtag #voices4justice. Please also email a high resolution photo of your Vigil to angela.owen@micahchallenge.org.au (with a short description of your event) for use in our own communication.

Be sure to stay connected with Micah Australia for further campaigning and Voices for Justice activities at www.micahchallenge.org.au.

Bible passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Global Poverty Statistics

Hope

- ▶ Since 1990 two billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty and the proportion living below the absolute poverty line (\$1.25/day) has halved (falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015).
- ▶ Since 1990, both primary net enrolment and global literacy rose from 83% to 91% and the number of children out of school has halved to 57 million.
- ▶ “The dramatic decline in preventable child deaths over the past quarter of a century is one of the most significant achievements in human history” (MDG Report 2015, p33). More children are surviving past their fifth birthday than ever before with child mortality rates reduced by more than 50% since 1990. Annual deaths of children under five worldwide fell from 12.7 million in 1990, to 6 million in 2015, which is approximately 18,500 fewer children dying each day than 20 years ago.
- ▶ More women are experiencing safe pregnancies with global maternal mortality rates reduced by 45% between 1990 and 2013, from 380 to 210 deaths per 100,000 live births.
- ▶ Between 2000 and 2015, an estimated 7.6 million deaths from AIDS, 6.2 million malaria deaths and 37 million tuberculosis deaths have been averted due to provision of antiretroviral therapy (ART), insecticide-treated mosquito nets and DOTS/Stop TB interventions.
- ▶ Since 1990, the world has seen significant progress in improved water access (from 76% to 91% of the world's population) and approximately 2 billion additional people have gained access to an improved sanitation facility (one that separates people from faeces hygienically).

Global Poverty Statistics

Grief

- ▶ Approximately 16,000 children under five years old still die every day from preventable diseases (which equates to approximately 6 million children dying each year). 2 million deaths per year occur in the first week of life.
- ▶ Approximately 300,000 women in developing countries across the world still die each year from (mostly preventable) causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.
- ▶ Despite progress, almost 2.5 billion people around the world still do not have access to a clean working toilet, and water, sanitation and hygiene related diseases are the second biggest killer of children worldwide.
- ▶ “Despite many successes (of the Millennium Development Goals), the poorest and most vulnerable people are being left behind” (MDG Report 2015, p8).
Millions of poor people still live in poverty and hunger, without access to basic services:
 - o 800 million people still live in extreme poverty
 - o 795 million people are still undernourished; 1 in 9 do not have enough to eat
 - o 16,000 children and 800 women die of preventable causes every day
 - o 160 million children's are stunted
 - o 57 million children are not in school
 - o 946 million people are open defecators
 - o 880 million people are slum-dwellers
- ▶ Australia's aid program has recently received huge cuts and by next year we will be giving just 22 cents in every \$100 of our national income – the lowest ever level of aid since records began.
- ▶ Australia is now ranked 15th amongst the 28 OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) aid donors making us a comparatively less generous nation than we have ever been.

Statistics from the Millennium Development Goals Report, July 2015.