

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 nation and the way it helps or hinders God's work of peace, mercy, and justice in the wider community of nations.

1 Timothy 2:1–2

"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."

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:

- a) One or more Bible readings
- b) Prayer led by someone in the congregation
- c) 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)
- PowerPoint 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 Australia Public Gathering 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 on our nation to be a good neighbour in the community of nations.

We celebrate the flourishing of individuals, communities, and nations, as tangible expressions of God's love for humanity. We offer praise to God for all that has been achieved in alleviating the impacts of poverty and inequality; for the children receiving education; the increase in prenatal and maternal health; the reduction in preventable deaths and disease; and 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, there is still so much more 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 has the power to change lives and bring restoration to broken systems, and that 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 Australia'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, children and youth programs 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."

Prayer for the church

Lord Jesus,

*We acknowledge that you are the head of the Church,
And we confess that we often lose sight of your Lordship.*

You are our vision, our heart, our hope.

You are what knits us together,

You are what makes us a family.

Would you unite us, guide us, and fill us afresh with your vision for the world?

Would you grant us your eyes to see those who are suffering,

Your heart to feel and be moved by love,

Your Spirit to make us people of peace,

Your strength to step forward and act with courage.

Lord, help us to cast our eyes beyond our own interests and fears,
To fix our eyes on you,

*Lord, help us to cast our eyes beyond our own interests and fears,
To fix our eyes on you,
And to see you in all those around us,
Especially the least of these.
Shape us as people of hope, mercy, reconciliation and justice;
Help us to be your church, as you intend us to be.
Help us to respond to your call with joyfulness and humility,
Help us to be a light in dark places.*

To you be the glory for ever and ever,

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 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."

Prayer for our nation's leaders

*Lord of Creation, Ruler of Heaven and Earth,
We pray for our own nation's leaders today.*

*You have called those in power to act with justice and compassion.
God of justice, help our leaders to conform to your righteous rule.*

*May they be seekers of the common good,
And may they use their power for the benefit of those with the least power.*

*Help them to serve not only their electorate, or their nation,
But as leaders of Australia, to serve the world and its poorest people.*

*May they exert every effort to combat climate change & care for your creation,
Prioritizing people and planet over profit.
May they shape Australia to be a good global neighbour,
Who seeks the best for the people of our region.
May they champion policies of welcome and compassion,
Rather than fear and cruelty.*

*Fill them with courage to make hard choices,
And to stand up for what is right.
Fill them also with humility to serve others, and acknowledge their own shortcomings.*

God of justice, help our leaders live up to your standards.

*Would you especially strengthen and give wisdom to those seeking to follow you;
Clothe them with your compassion and justice,
That amidst politics, they might never lose sight of who they are called to be.*

*Lord of Creation, Ruler of Heaven and Earth,
We pray for our nation's leaders today.*

Moment 3: Prayer for our nation

Themes:

- Prayer for Australia and its role in the community of nations.
- Asking for justice and righteousness to prevail in 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."

Prayer for our nation

Lord God,

We are grateful for so many things about Australia – from its natural beauty to its prosperity and freedom from conflict.

But God, we are also sorry for so many things.

We are sorry for our lack of generosity, our fear of difference, and our refusal to better steward your creation.

We are sorry of our small-heartedness, selfishness and lack of vision.

We are ashamed of our deceitfulness; the deceitfulness that says we do not have enough to share.

We are ashamed of our arrogance; the arrogance that says our lives are more important than our neighbours'.

Forgive us, Father!

God, use us as a nation to bring your peace and justice in our region and in our world.

Make us a good global neighbour, we pray.

Help us to be generous, welcoming, and committed stewards of your creation.

Help us to be big-hearted, selfless, with the vision to look beyond ourselves and beyond the present moment, for the benefit of future generations.

Help your church to be a powerful and united voice,

Shaping our nation for your purposes.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.

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 people as an act of prayer 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

Psalm 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 world:

*Our loving Father,
We are in awe of the beauty of your world,
Of its diversity and complexity,
Of its creativity and fruitfulness.*

*And yet, our hearts are burdened with sadness,
Our world, your world, is scarred by injustice.
Too many image-bearers still go to bed hungry,
Too many children are being exploited and preyed upon,
Too many women face exclusion and oppression,
Too many workers are not receiving their wages,
Too many communities are facing increased danger from climate change,
Too many nations are ravaged by war.*

*Loving God, we cry out to you,
When will this suffering end?
When will your kingdom come?*

*We long for your shalom in this world,
For it to break through,
Bring light to darkness,
Wholeness to brokenness,
Right injustice,
And bring your creation to complete beauty.*

*We cannot wait for the day when all will have enough,
When you wipe away every tear from our eyes.*

*Loving God, we cry out to you,
We give to you our hopes and fears,
Our dreams, your dreams, for your world,
And ask that you bring them into being.*

*May your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On Earth as it is in Heaven.*

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 communications@micahaustralia.org (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.micahaustralia.org

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).

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:

- 800 million people still live in extreme poverty
- 795 million people are still undernourished; 1 in 9 do not have enough to eat
- 16,000 children and 800 women die of preventable causes every day

- 160 million children's are stunted
 - 57 million children are not in school
 - 946 million people are open defecators
 - 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



Micah is a movement of Australian Christians raising a powerful voice for justice and a world free from poverty.