

MLK Boulevards, Streets, Roads Become Altars in International Prayer Event

Giving birth to a new era of justice first envisioned by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is one goal of an international racial equality and justice movement that begins this weekend in 200 cities across the United States and 11 nations.

For two hours on Saturday, Martin Luther King boulevards, streets and monuments around the world will become altars of prayer, repentance, praise, worship, outreach and proclamation hosted by believers from across denominational and ethnic backgrounds.

Called "Pray on MLK," the historic event will unite believers in a global, socially distanced, human prayer chain against racism and injustice from 6:01 to 8:01 p.m. It is a project of Civil Righteousness, a Ferguson, Missouri-based nonprofit dedicated to racial reconciliation and restorative justice through spiritual, cultural and economic renewal.

The organization's president, Jonathan Tremaine Thomas, says Dr. King's dream 50-plus years ago is a rallying cry for the church to move out to troubled streets with the hope that's rooted in the Bible.

"I believe that we are in one of the most important and critical moments in the modern era due to—not only the global pandemic—but also because of the disease that's been epidemic since the beginning of time: the sinfulness of man, which causes humanity to be inhumane to and violate one another," says Thomas.

An African American living in a city that's experienced its share of justified anger and division over poor race

relations, Thomas says the Lord is bringing correction first to the church because judgment begins there.

From the church, the Lord wants to use His people to demonstrate to the culture a love of justice and righteousness.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven" (see Matt. 6:10, Luke 11:2), He provided contrasts between the two.

"We know that in heaven, there is no injustice," Thomas says. "In heaven there is the beauty of God that is made known and expressed through every person. So the issues of race and justice are central to the understanding of who God is, and why [Jesus] came to earth to redeem people from every tribe, tongue and nation.

"He came to create a house of faith—really a family—according to 2 Peter," says Thomas, who points out the words "holy nation" in the Bible mean *ethnos*, or "one new man," which includes women.

Thomas says that, while women are chosen by God to give birth in the natural realm, God uses men, too. In natural and spiritual birth, there are similarities. "There's a Scripture in Isaiah that states, 'As soon as Zion travails, it gives birth,'" which include a breaking or tearing of a veil.

"I think we see that the water has broken in America. There's weeping; there's tears. God wants to give birth," Thomas says.

Since the days of Dr. King and his dream, God has been looking for people, as in the days of the prophet Ezekiel, who would stand in the gap on behalf of the land and build up a wall.

"There are many other movements in the nation and among the nations where people who follow Jesus. But there's been a real silence and void.

"There have been gaps, and we're stepping into that now, hoping that we can enter into the dream of God—that day Dr. King often cited in his messages where people won't be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. One day where little Black boys and little Black girls, little white boys and little white girls will hold hands, play together, skip and sing in the streets. The one day where freedom will ring from every mountaintop and every low place," Thomas says.

It's no surprise to Thomas, Pray on MLK directors, pastors, and prayer and ministry leaders that people around the world are committed to taking their place on the wall Saturday—in some cases, even before the Aug. 8 event.

A woman claims the Lord directed her to pray on a Martin Luther King street in Oregon before she heard about the international, two-hour prayer chain on Saturday beginning at 6:01 pm., according to Pacific Regional Director Brittany Baker.

"She said, 'I was going to do this myself because I felt called by the Lord.' Now she says, 'I'm going to join in with you [Pray on MLK],' " Baker says from her home in Sacramento, California.

"I think God's saying He doesn't want lone rangers," Baker says. "He's wanting all of us under His agenda, to try not to be the person but to equip His bride."

In Sacramento, a pastor on Martin Luther King Boulevard also connected with Baker. He told her somebody was recently killed on that street, which has one of the highest crime and poverty rates in California.

"The pastor was compelled to do something. He told me the Lord's asking him to put out a sign, to just do something as a church. I said, 'Let's do this together,'" explains Baker.

Along Martin Luther King Boulevard in Denver, God has moved on the heart of a pastor to pray since January, says 24/7 prayer leader Kenn Atkinson, and Colorado's oldest African Methodist Episcopal Church will host Saturday's event.

Atkinson says a pastor of Providence Bible Church and ministry leader of Denver Prays has done just that since COVID-19 shuttered its doors. In January, the church was inspired to start a 24/7 prayer movement. Initially, it prayed for 72 hours. Then the Lord led the pastor and his church to 72 hours of virtual prayer for the state, Atkinson says.

One hundred churches and 1,900 people joined in Zoom rooms to pray. In June, the prayer focus was justice and racial equality, says Atkinson, who lives in a Denver suburb. With his wife, they've trekked into the city to scout out locations and pray in advance of Pray on MLK.

"That [Martin Luther King Boulevard] is one of the most diverse areas in Denver," Atkinson says. "There's been a lot of racial injustice there.

"The AME church I was telling you about has been significant in the civil rights movement. They had a church in a different location that was burned down by the KKK and, of course, a former Denver mayor who was a Klansman. So it's significant that God's moving us to pray together as people in the Denver area in this particular region [along Martin Luther King Boulevard]," Atkinson says.

There are many churches along Martin Luther King Boulevard, so two women from Atkinson's team intentionally reached out to all of them.

Atkinson says the Denver event will follow the Pray on MLK model. "They're having us pray silently—with tape over mouths—for an hour, repenting. Then there's going to be an hour of worship after the first [hour]."

For more information, visit Pray on MLK's website and Facebook page. {eoa}