

Pray on MLK: Worship, Prayer and Discussion Planned to Unite Believers Jan. 18

A fifth-generation pastor, evangelist and missionary is seizing this year's Martin Luther King Jr. holiday as a prayer gathering for believers who desire national change and transformation.

Called "Pray on MLK," the day is an opportunity for people to gather in towns and cities across the nation, as well as online in what its leader, Pastor Jonathan Tremaine Thomas, hopes is a repeat of recent history.

The inaugural Pray on MLK in August of 2020 gathered thousands across all 50 states and from 300-plus cities in a multi-ethnic human chain along streets and near monuments named after the preacher and civil rights leader.

The second Pray on MLK event is set for Monday, Jan. 18, a national holiday two days before the inauguration of the 46th president of the United States.

The founder and president of Civil Righteousness and leader of Pray on MLK, Thomas joined a group in his hometown, St. Louis, last August as hundreds of volunteer organizers across the nation simultaneously led those gathered in worship and prayer.

Taking the Next Step

Grateful for reports of success from field organizers across the nation and tons of favorable publicity, Thomas went to bed.

"I think it was either going to sleep or waking up, I heard the Lord say, 'Call America to Pray on MLK.'

“I said, ‘Lord, we just did Pray on MLK.’

“Again, I heard, ‘Call America to Pray on MLK.’

“Then I realized, oh, it’s call America to Pray on MLK, meaning on MLK day; I knew we had another invitation (from the Lord),” says Thomas, whose family tree includes African and Native American ministers dating back to slavery.

Civil Righteousness staff and Pray on MLK field organizers rallied, utilizing social media to spread the word that its work continues. Since Aug. 8, volunteers have hosted follow-up events across the nation.

They’re still welcoming latecomers who want to sign up to lead or attend a live group on Jan. 18 in city squares, churches, schools and parks, recognizing social distancing guidelines associated with COVID-19. An interactive map identifies locations where Pray on MLK events are scheduled and where they’re still needed.

Praying for Healing

“We’re going to call out to God for His mercy,” Thomas says. “We’re going to pray around specific issues related to righteousness, justice, unity, healing, oneness, with certain themes that were critical to the Civil Rights movement.”

At public events some people will place white tape—signifying purity of speech—over their mouths with words that identify how they’re praying, or what their hopes are for the nation. While it’s a one-hour prayer meeting, the gathering looks like a peaceful street protest.

Thomas says the model is for any city or community where there’s been a historic dividing line or, what he and others call an “altar of pain”—a place where there’s been loss of life due to either a systemic injustice, a race-related encounter or incident, or a location where there’s been a

historical, painful divide in a community.

“We’re just encouraging people to do something on that day, something to respond to this invitation to lay hold to the heart of God and to really go low and lift up our nation before the Lord,” Thomas says.

By carving out an hour for the Lord, people are building a spiritual “wall of righteousness with stones of prayer around the nation,” he says.

In other communities people will host “Hope Rallies,” a time of prayer, worship and proclamation of hope—both in person and online.

Open Discussion at ‘Table’ Events

The ideas for Hope Rallies and Prayer Walls emerged—along with a concept called a “Table”—after the first Pray on MLK; they’ve filled the gap as tools in reconciliation ministry since then.

For Table events, leaders provide topics of conversation within families, and among individuals, organizations and communities.

“We encourage people to find persons with whom they might disagree politically, who might look different ethnically, who have different cultural experiences, and build a table of brotherhood. Have a conversation. Sit down and have a meal and conversations,” Thomas says.

There’s one requirement: A commitment from members to stick with conversation at the tables until the parties find each other through the blood of Jesus.

As the family of God situated at a table, members have to progress to a place where they’re allowed to be honest with each other, yet united in the bond of peace, a theme based on Psalm 133.

Two partner organizations—both missional in nature—agree with the vision of Pray on MLK and Civil Righteousness. Missio Nexis and Missio Benefits recently offered their influence with leaders from 60,000 churches and 45 denominations, including the predominantly Black Church of God in Christ and the National Baptist Convention. The National Day of Prayer Task Force is also encouraging prayer warriors to participate in the Pray on MLK event.

Whether prophetic, worship or prayer, leaders are still confirming their desire to engage with Pray on MLK on Jan. 18, Thomas says.

However, “the unity and the bond of peace is so fragile because of the intensity of our political and cultural climate. I know there are some people—just to be honest—that would not be involved if they found out that somebody else was involved.

“I know that’s a really sad state but it’s the reality of how divided the church has been,” Thomas says.

“Ultimately, they’re going to know that we’re Christians by our love for one another, meaning that if you do not have love for the Democrat who calls himself a believer or the Republican who calls himself a believer—if you don’t have love for the person who views the world different from you politically or experiences the world differently from you ethnically, if you cannot love them—then in fact your inability to love will reveal that you are not His,” Thomas adds.

In partnership with Civil Righteousness and Pray on MLK, the YouVersion Bible application is hosting a six-day study with video on God’s heart for oneness. The final study highlights Pray on MLK, preparing the hearts of people intent on seeking national change and transformation.

The 7 p.m. (CST) online prayer meeting. will feature leaders

from different denominational streams. {eoa}

Steve Rees is a former general assignment reporter who, with one other journalist, first wrote about the national men's movement Promise Keepers from his home in Colorado. Rees and Promise Keepers Founder Bill McCartney attended the Boulder Vineyard. Today Rees writes in his free time.