Prayer Service for Victims of Genocide

As preparation for the prayer service, have participants read the fact sheets on Rwanda found on pages 3 and 4 of this resource.

OPENING PRAYER

(Light a candle with each remembrance below)

Leader: We Remember . . .
Reader 1: The 1 million men, women and children who died violently in Rwanda 10 years ago because of ethnic hatred.

Leader: We remember . . .
Reader 2: The cries of the mothers as their children were tortured and killed before their eyes in Rwanda.

Leader: We remember . . .
Reader 3: The terror of the children as their fathers were tortured and killed before their eyes.

Leader: We remember . . .
Reader 4: The haunted survivors of this holocaust.

Leader: We remember . . .
Reader 5: The silence of the international community as reports of the Rwandan slaughters circulated.

Leader: We remember . . .
Reader 6: Our own indifference to the genocide in Rwanda.

Leader: We remember . . .
Reader 7: We remember and we mourn.

COMMON PRAYER

O Lord, we cry to you, with deep pain in our hearts and souls.
Our hearts ache, because of genocide caused by the lust for power over other humans, cruel hatred for others, because of their race, religion or physical differences.
God of all, the heavens weep, the winds whisper through this great world you have created.
We hear and feel the weeping in our own souls.
Open our eyes and cleanse our souls that we may always remember the awful injustices.
How long, O God, will we look with empty souls and eyes, how long?
The answer, “Until you feel my pain for all my children.”
We cry in shame. Forgive us Lord.
Amen.

REFLECTIONS

“It is my hope that as Rwanda emerges from the nightmare of the recent past, it will have the support of the international community in its efforts to re-establish the structures of civil society and promote an integral economic and human development capable of eliminating the deeper causes of injustice and social unrest…If the tragic events of the recent past revealed the destructive power of evil and harted, the present work of national reconstruction presents an important opportunity for the Rwandan people to bear witness to the even greater power of good ever present in the human heart, a good which expresses itself politically in the pursuit of a just and fraternal society based on unstinting respect for the
innate dignity and rights of each human person, regardless of ethnic origin or political views . . . Through her proclamation of the Gospel and her witness to the moral law, the Church seeks to inculcate reverence for God, the Creator of all, an understanding of the sublime destiny of each man and woman, and an awareness of the God-given unity of the human race, a unity which embraces and is enriched by diversity.”
Address of Pope John Paul II, 1995

“Goodness is stronger than evil , Love is stronger than hate, Light is stronger than darkness, Life is stronger than death, and hope is ours through One who loves us.”
Bishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa

(Share your reflections on the suffering in the world and the hope we must create as Christians.)

INTERCESSIONS
Leader: We pray for all the victims of Genocide
All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for the victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1914-1918 , when 1½ million Armenian people were killed.
All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for the victims of the Holocaust during 1939-1945, when 6 million Jews were killed.
All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for the victims of the Cambodian Genocide of 1975-1978 , when 1.7 million men, women and children were violently killed.
All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for the victims of the Genocide in Kosovo from 1991-2000, when thousands were tortured, raped and killed.
All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for the victims of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 when 1 million people were killed.
All: Lord, hear our prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER
Holy Spirit, you came to us in every language of every culture and every nation.
Pour out your power upon our divisions.
Make us remember that every tongue is a reflection of your creation.
You converted our babble of sounds into speech.
You made our differences become our hope.
But we have run away from each other,
And have created enclaves of race, color, and creed.
Bring us back to a place where we can hear you, see you,
And feel your presence in every human being.
And we pray for peace among us in Your name.
Amen.
Fact Sheet: Rwanda

Rwanda is a country in the central part of Africa that experienced the genocide (see definition below) of one million of its citizens in 1994.

Genocide: The attempt to destroy a national, ethnic, racial and/or religious group (and its supporters) through officially sanctioned persecution, violence, and mass executions and killings. The Nazi persecution and murder of 6 million Jewish people during World War II is one example of genocide.

Rwanda has become a symbol of the modern-day failure of the world to end genocide. Too many times in history humans have pledged “Never Again!,” only to see the tragedy of widespread ethnic violence occur in another location. The tenth anniversary, April, 2004, of the Rwanda Genocide provides an opportunity to reflect on the universal goal of preventing genocide, to use the lessons we have learned to work towards a day when genocide will truly be a thing of the past, and to pray for the end of all ethnic hatred and violence.
Fact Sheet: A Brief History of Rwanda

- Rwanda is made up of 3 ethnic groups: the Hutu (85% of the population), the Tutsi (14%) and the indigenous Twa (less than 1%). There has been a long history of ethnic tension between these groups.

- Before being colonized by Belgium in 1919, the Tutsi cattle lords governed over a feudal-like system with the Hutu farmers tending the land and growing food crops.

- Rwanda was a Belgian colony from 1919 until 1962. Tensions and differences between the Tutsis and Hutus increased in part because of Belgian policy and racial ideology. Under the Belgians, the Tutsis’ status over the Hutus was reinforced; the Tutsis were educated by the Belgians and given positions of authority.

- In 1962, Rwanda became independent, and hundreds of thousands of Tutsis fled the country as the Hutu majority finally gained power.

- As the country struggled economically and politically, in 1973, Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu from the north of Rwanda, became president, setting up a one-party state, the MRND (National Revolutionary Movement for Development).

- Tutsi exiles in Uganda set up the RPF (Rwandese Patriotic Front), trained and supported by Uganda, and in October 1990 launched an invasion in Rwanda. As a result, two years of fighting continued off and on. There was a cease-fire, but RPF forces remained in Rwanda.

- In 1993, President Habyarimana signed the Arusha Accords in Tanzania, which stated that he would allow other parties to join the government and integrate the RPF in the Rwandan army. A United Nations force was sent to oversee the plan toward power-sharing and stabilizing the area.

- As President Habyarimana returned to Rwanda in April 1994 from concluding another agreement, his plane was shot down by Hutu extremists, who were fearful that the president would surrender Hutu supremacy.

- Within a very short time after the plane was downed, massacres of Hutu opposition leaders and of Tutsis began in the Rwanda capital, Kigali, and through planning led by leaders in the capital spread to the rest of the county. In 100 days, approximately 1 million Tutsis and Hutu moderates who opposed the genocide were massacred.

- Three quarters of the Tutsi population were killed and, following the genocide, many thousands of Hutu died as a result of Tutsi reaction to the genocide.

- Belgium, France, the U.S. and the United Nations suspected the genocide was being planned. Months before it occurred, the UN Commander in Rwanda warned of this, yet nothing was done to prevent the massacre.

- In 1994, the UN established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to investigate the genocide, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.

- A 1999 independent inquiry into the events in Rwanda commissioned by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan concluded that “the overriding failure in the international communality’s response was the lack of resources and political will, as well as errors of judgment as to the nature of the events in Rwanda.”

- The people of Rwanda face enormous challenges as they attempt to rebuild their country and keep the peace.

Sources: Trócaire; The Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, American University Washington College of Law