



We live in economically and racially segregated communities that make it easy to be complacent about our poor neighbors, those who clean our office buildings, serve tables at our favorite restaurants, mow our lawns, keep our grocery stores stocked with food, and take care of the sick and elderly.

Complacency over the scourge of poverty can be seen in the priorities we set in our federal budgets. Money is lavished on weapon systems and nuclear weapons while money to make housing, food, education, and healthcare more affordable are treated as expensive extravagances.

This Prayer Service is adapted, with permission, from the Bread of Life Ritual by Nancy Small, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace and the Pax Christi *Bread not Stone Toolkit* created and written by Tom Cordaro, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace

Preparation--- For each person, gather a stone and a slice of bread/bun. Groups may desire small tip sharpies to write on the stones, a white table cloth for a small table/altar area, a small basket, and small loaves of bread/buns/slices of bread

Prayer Service

As each person enters the prayer space, they are given a small stone.

Reader 1: In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized the parental care of God by comparing it to the care we give our own children. “Is there anyone among you, who if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?” (Mt. 7:9) Jesus makes the point that, even we who are sinful, would never give our children a stone if they asked for bread. And yet, in many ways, our national budget priorities do exactly that.

Reader 2: We live in the wealthiest nation on earth, yet millions of people live in poverty. They cry out for life-sustaining bread, but we offer them stones by wasting money on bloated military budgets instead of funding their needs. *Lord, have mercy.*

All: Lord, have mercy.

Global military expenditures surpassed \$2 trillion for the first time ever last year, with the United States spending more on its war-making capacity than the next nine nations combined. At the same time, foreign assistance remains less than 1% of the federal budget. *Christ have mercy.*

All: Christ have mercy

Reader 3: The U.S. has spent 7.5 times more money on nuclear weapons than on global COVID-19 vaccine donations, despite President Biden’s pledge that America would become “the world arsenal of vaccines.” *Lord have mercy.*

All: Lord have mercy

Reader 4: Congress appropriated \$858 billion in defense spending, which was \$37 billion more than requested by the president. At the same time, the child tax credit, expanded by Congress in 2021, which reduced child poverty by more than 30%, was not renewed. *Christ have mercy.*

All: Christ have mercy

Reader 2: Our new military budget would provide almost \$27 billion for Navy ship construction, \$4.1 billion more than was requested. It includes plans for 29 transport planes for \$3.1 billion; 20 more than requested. Appropriators also found \$900 million to buy a dozen fighter jets that the administration did not formally request. At the same time, four in ten low-income people in the U.S. experience homelessness or spend over half their income on rent. Most don't receive federal rental assistance due to limited funding. *Lord have mercy.*

All: Lord have mercy.

Reader 3: Our nation turns a blind eye to those in need of food security, jobs that pay a living wage, affordable housing and childcare, quality education, and healthcare. For the moral blindness of our nation, we pray, *Christ have mercy.*

All: Christ, have mercy.

Reader 4: We could offer all who hunger the bread they need if we were willing to shift our priorities from weapons to the well-being of people in need. But we fail to recognize that true security lies in improving the lives of all people, especially those considered the least among us. For the misguided priorities of our nation, *Lord have mercy.*

All: Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and give us the grace to act for social justice in pursuit of peace. Amen.

All are invited to hold their stones at this time if they are not already doing so.

Reader 1: These are the stones we give to our children when they cry out for bread. They are heavy with the weight of injustice. I invite you now to name an injustice that your stone represents. You may name your injustice aloud or in the silence of your heart and write it on the stone if you wish.

Pause while injustices are named, and/or written on their stone

Reader 1: I invite you now to place your stone in this basket.

God, open our ears to hear the cries of those whose needs are sacrificed at the altar of military might. Convert our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh that feel the longings of the least among us, hearts that beat with compassion for the common good. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus, prophet and purveyor of Peace. **Amen.**

Reader 1: We believe in a brighter tomorrow that shines with the promise of peace. We believe in the banquet table where all members of the beloved community eat their fill. We now set this table before us with our hopes for a brighter tomorrow.

A tablecloth is placed on the table/altar with these or similar words:

Reader 2: We declare this table to be a place where all are welcome, a place where division ceases and diversity flourishes, and a place where all have an equal voice.

Reader 3: We bring to this table compassion and care for the common good.

Participant bring loaves of bread (or a basket with several small loaves, buns or slices is brought) forward as the following words are read. For individual prayer, each participant should have a symbolic slice/piece of bread.

Reader 1: We make room at this table for those who are marginalized. We want to hear their voices. We want all voices to partake in the national dialogue about funding priorities.

Reader 2: We bring to this table the truth that there is plenty of food for all who hunger to have their fill if we choose bread over stones. We consecrate this table as a place where those who live in poverty can sit down with those who have plenty and share in a harvest of justice.

Prayers for Conversion and Grace

Reader 4: Jesus tells us that if we had the faith of a mustard seed, we could move mountains (Matthew 17:20). Today, we come before God realizing that the mountain that needs to be moved is us. We do not petition God to do things for us; we pray that God empowers us to act as we are called to do.

Jesus, you promised that those who come to you will never hunger and those who believe in you will never thirst for you are the Bread of Life. We choose the Bread of Life for all who suffer from food insecurity. We lift up to you those who depend on soup kitchens, food pantries, and food stamps to survive. This bread reminds us that there is enough food for all to have their fill if we prioritize food security in our federal budget.

Response: We choose bread, not stones.

Reader 3: Source of Our Salvation, give us the courage to reject the idols of guns and bombs; that falsely promise salvation and safety, but only bring death and destruction: we pray...

ALL: Give us bread, not stones.

Reader 2: Creator of the Cosmos, you made us stewards of this garden called Earth, to care for every creature and protect all the elements of water, earth, and sky that make life possible. Help us to reject the notion that we are separate from creation and give us the wisdom and will to nurture all life: we pray...

ALL: Give us bread, not stones.

Reader 1: Mother of All Humanity, you made us different sizes, colors, genders, and ethnicities that we might learn to love and celebrate your divinity in our diversity. Give us the clarity of perception, to see one another as sisters and brothers. Give us an unwavering conviction to protect and love one another. We pray...

ALL: Give us bread, not stones.

Reader 2: God of Plenty, you created a world of abundance and instructed us to share the riches of this world with one another – from each in accordance to their ability, to each in accordance to their need. Give us your spirit of justice, that we may never grow tired in our efforts to protect the dignity of all, we pray...

ALL: Give us bread, not stones.

Reader 3: Healer of All the Nations, your son came to heal the body and soul of all who suffer; without cost and without favor. Grant us the virtue of compassion for all those in need of healthcare, and give us the persistence to continue the work of making healing available to all, we pray...

ALL: Give us bread, not stones.

Reader 4: Jesus, you told your disciples that you had nowhere to lay your head. We choose the Bread of Life for all who experience homelessness and housing insecurity. Jesus, you said, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We choose the Bread of Life for all who experience poverty. Jesus, you touched all who came to you in need of healing. We choose the Bread of Life for all who are uninsured or underinsured. Jesus, you told Peter to put away his sword as you cultivated a culture of peace. We choose the Bread of Life in a culture saturated with gun violence.

Response: This bread reminds us that there is enough food for all to have their fill if we prioritize food security in our federal budget. This bread reminds us that housing is possible for all people if we prioritize affordable housing in our federal budget. This bread reminds us that we can break the chains of poverty if we prioritize need and say no to greed in our federal budget. This bread reminds us that we can prioritize initiatives that foster peace and promote the well-being of all over deadly weapons that wound bodies and souls and tear us apart. We choose bread, not stones.

Tell Me (poem from Pax Christi toolkit)

Tell me;

what is national security to a family hounded by debt collectors because they cannot pay their medical bills; or to an elderly woman who is afraid to go to a doctor because she knows she cannot afford it; or to the diabetic on insulin who must skip injections until he gets his next paycheck?

Please tell me;

what is national security to the mother facing a 30-day late rent notice taped to her front door; who feels the walls closing in around her; whose shrinking horizon is limited to surviving the day, as she scrambles to find food for her children's next meal?

Can anyone tell me;

what is national security to a child experiencing homelessness who is forced to go to school in dirty clothes, who is teased because she smells, and never has the required school supplies; or to the LGBTQ+ child who gets shoved into lockers; is verbally assaulted by other students and whose complaints are dismissed because he is "so open about it"?

Won't someone please tell me;

what is national security to a child hiding under his school desk during an active-shooter drill; or to a family who never look out their front window for fear of being killed by a stray bullet; or to a young black man pulled over by the police who wonders, "Is this how I am going to die?"

Closing Prayer

Reader 1: Jesus, you multiplied loaves into more than enough for 5,000 people and filled twelve baskets with the excess. You spoke truth to power and amplified the voices of the destitute by accompanying them in their struggle for justice. Multiply our efforts to redirect military spending toward funding for the needs of marginalized communities. Amplify our voices and open the ears of the powerful to hear and heed our cries.

All: Jesus, Bread of Life, teach us how to fashion the stones of war into the bread of life for all who hunger. Empower us to be leavening agents of your transforming love. Show us how to become a nation that chooses bread, not stones. Amen.

Closing Song: Lori True – A Place at the Table (GIA Publications) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-C3PXPG0zCw>

