

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
of Los Angeles

Fulfilling The Dream For Freedom

18 January 2026



*Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
Tidal Basin, National Mall, Washington, D.C.*

540 S. Commonwealth Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90020
Telephone 213.385.1341 – www.FCCLA.org

The Gathering of the People

First Congregational Church of Los Angeles is a safe place for all people, and we celebrate our diversity of race, creed, age, ability, gender, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions... We extend a warm welcome to all this morning and especially those who are with us for the first time. Your presence both enriches us and this time of celebration together ~

Please note that our services are live streamed at fccla.org/live.

Organ Prelude Concert

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot
Aspiración
Homage to HDT and JSB
Nuptial Song
Now Thank We All Our God
2 Spirituals
 Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child 5:35
 Go Tell It on the Mountain 2:00
Joshua fit de battle ob Jericho

John West, Guest Organist
Carl Dixon 6:20
José Jesús Estrada 5:00
Ralph Simpson 3:30
Betty Jackson King 3:00
Setting by John West 3:00
Eugene Hancock

Fela Sowande 3:30

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome

Rev. Michael Lehman

Words of Gathering

Rev. Lehman & Dr. Jay Prewitt-Cruz

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted,
Every hill and mountain shall be made low,
The rough places will be made plain,
And the crooked places will be made straight,
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.

With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.
May it ever be so.

May it ever be so for all of us!

Please stand now, in body or in spirit, for our Hymn of Gathering

*Hymn of Gathering

Lift Every Voice and Sing
September Penn of Power of Song Inc., Conductor

ANTHEM

Lift every voice and sing 'till earth and heaven ring,
ring with the harmonies of Liberty.
Let our rejoicing rise high as the list'ning skies,
let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us.
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod bitter the chast'ning rod
felt in the day that hope unborn had died.
Yet with a steady beat have not our weary feet
come to the place on which our fathers sighed:
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered.
Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last
where the white gleam of our star is cast.

God of our weary years God of our silent tears
thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by thy might led us into the light
keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee.
Shadowed beneath the hand may we forever stand
true to our God true to our native land. -James Weldon and Rosemond Johnson

*Prayer of Awareness

Rev. Laura Vail Fregin

O God, all people are your Beloved,
across races, nationalities, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities,
and all the ways we are distinctive from one another.

*We are all manifestations of your image.
We are bound together in an inescapable network of mutuality
and tied to a single garment of destiny.
You call us into your unending work
of justice, peace and love.*

Let us know your presence among us now:
Let us delight in our diversity
that offers glimpses of the mosaic of your beauty.
Strengthen us with your steadfast love and
transform our despairing fatigue into hope-filled action.
Under the shadow of your wings in this hour
may we find rest and strength, renewal and hope.

*We ask this, inspired by the example
of your disciple, Martin Luther King, Jr.,
whose prophetic life showed us
the Way of Jesus.
Amen and Amen!*

*Introit

"Freedom In The Air"
Laude, Arnaé Batson, Leader

ARNAÉ BATSON

***The Lord's Prayer**

Dr. Prewitt-Cruz

*Our [God], who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kindom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kindom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.*

***Gloria Deo**

Glory be to God, and to the Christ and to the Holy Ghost,
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.
World without end, Amen, Amen.

***Passing of the Peace**

Rev. Lehman

As we gather in this sacred space and time,
out of all the hours of the week,
this is the hour when the light shines brightest.
This is our hour of courage, recommitment, and passion.

Each week, this is the perfect moment to practice
our belief that peace in the world is possible.

In this hour of illumination,
May the Peace of God be with you.
And also with you.

You are invited to share this ancient greeting with a bow

Please be seated

Reading from Our Religious Tradition

Dr. Prewitt-Cruz & Ianthe Marini

The Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4

This is the Gospel of Grace.
Thanks be to God!

Prayers with the People

Rev. Fregin

Invitation to Silence and Prayer

Silence

Communal Prayer of Our Hearts

God of Justice and Mercy,
we long to co-create with you the Beloved Community
which looks to the common good; privileges all equally,
and creates societal systems
which celebrates the humanity and the gifts of all.

*And yet we focus on our differences, we envy each other's gifts,
we devalue manifestations of you, O God, that are not like our own.*

Perhaps our collective failure is a slow wait for justice:
When we have not allowed the voices of our siblings
who do not look like us, love like us, or worship like us
to be silenced.

*Or perhaps, O God, we have kept silence ourselves
in the face of the struggle for full human life.
For it is not solely hateful words and actions,
but also, appalling silence that follows the path of oppression.*

Perhaps our failure is that we give in to weariness, discouragement, bitterness:
You have called us to be drum majors for justice, peace and righteousness,
yet the work of peace and justice overwhelms us at times.
To build with you the Beloved Community seems impossible,
and we grow weary.

*We cry, "Peace, peace,"
but there is no peace within us or around us.
And if we are not careful, we find ourselves on the path
of hatred and oppression, violence and war –
a path that we abhor in others
and do not recognize in ourselves.*

Thankfully, O God, you do not leave us in our despair.
You send us prophets who give their lives in calling us to dream
of justice and reconciliation and you ask us to give *our lives*
to make those dreams become reality.
How precious is your steadfast love for us.

*In these days, as we you call us to celebrate the variety of our gifts,
remind us that our work is not in vain.
Equip us to walk in your ways as we serve the common good
even as you help us to grow into all that you have dreamed
we can be in this, our time and place.*

May it be so.
May it be so for all of us.
Amen and Amen!

Meditation Anthem

"Someday We'll All Be Free"
Christin Byrdsong, *Soloist*

DONNY HATHAWAY

Sermon

The Light of Today

Rev. Lehman

Special Music sung by the Fulfilling The Dream Mass Choir

"None Of Us Are Free"
Arnaé Batson, *Leader*

ARNAÉ BATSON

I'm On My Way To Freedom's Land CARRON REESE, arr. ARNAÉ BATSON
Arnaé Batson, Molly Pease, Christin Byrdsong, David Harris, & Kayo Anderson

Freedom's Going To Reign
Arnaé Batson, *Leader*, John West, *Piano*, Christoph Bull, *Organ*

CARRON REESE

KAYO ANDERSON & CREATING JUSTICE ARTIVIST VILLAGE
The Radical King
Kayo Anderson, Kay Kang, Naomi Welikila, & Marcel Sawyer

We Shall Overcome
Kayo Anderson, *Leader* and *Soloist*, Brandon Harris, *Conductor*, Christoph Bull, *Organ*

arr. KAYO ANDERSON

The Mass Choir each year is comprised of singers from groups across the city. We are grateful to all of our artistic partners and friends who participate each year in this communal expression. We also extend a warm thank you to the community at Creating Justice L.A., who have partnered with us on this event for the past three years.

Invitation to Generosity**Rev. Fregin**

At First Church, we consider every pledge, tithe, offering and contribution a gift for the life of our community of faith. No matter how they're given, our gifts show gratitude. You are invited to visit our website at fccla.org/give. Our hospitality team will also bring baskets for your in-person gifts during the Offertory.

Offertory

"Total Praise"

RICHARD SMALLWOOD

The Mass Choir, Brandon Harris, *Conductor*, John West, *Piano*, Christoph Bull, *Organ*

***Doxology**

From all that dwell below the skies,
let the Creator's praise arise!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Your name shall sound and praises soar
till suns shall rise and set no more.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

[adapt/Isaac Watts, 1719]

***Offering Prayer**

Holy One,
light of the world,
you have been present in us this morning.

Dr. Prewitt-Cruz

Rooted in your love,
filled with your peace,
illumined by your grace,
may we always be.

Kindle our hearts into quiet strength,
calm our spirits into restoration
that we may give all that we are
and all that we have,
to bring wholeness to your world again.

May it be so, O God.
May it be so for all of us.
Amen and Amen!

Please be seated

Life at First Church

Rev. Lehman

Words of Blessing

Rev. Lehman

This morning as we prepare to leave this time together
and as we remember the legacy of Dr. King...

*We ask as he did for God to bless us...
with discomfort
at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships
so that we may live from deep within our hearts.*

We ask God to bless us with anger
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God's creations
so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

*We ask God to bless us with tears
for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,
so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and
to turn their pain into joy.*

And we ask God to bless us with just enough foolishness
to believe that we can make a difference in the world,
so that we can do what others claim cannot be done...
by bringing justice and kindness to all God's children
and all our neighbors who poor in heart, spirit,
and resources.

*May it be so both now,
all in all the days to come!*

*Hymn for the Journey

"We've Got A Job"

CARLTON REESE

We will sing the words in all capital letters in response to the leader
I've got a job, you've got a job,
All of God's children surely have a job.
We've got a job to do, can't get freedom 'till we get through.
Carry'ng the cross for our rights.

Freedom! (repeat many times)
We've got a job to do, can't get freedom 'till we get through.
Carry'ng the cross for our rights.

Postlude

134 Roll, Jordan, Roll

John West, Guest Organist

Ralph Simpson

Inside The Music

"Dr. Prewitt-Cruz and I were discussing Birmingham last week. Singing Carlton Reese's music stirred memories of the city we both know from our childhoods. When Laurel and I were there for Christmas, we ended up in West Birmingham with my dad. He gave us a tour of where he grew up, and told stories of being a child there in the 1960s. The common thread in all of these conversations had to do with the varied ways that people responded to the overwhelming experiences of that time. As Dr. King and civil rights activists stood up against a system that had been leveraged against them, everyone had a choice of how they would respond. Some people were on the front lines to non-violently demand change. Others pushed against them, sometimes violently, to maintain the system. For some, quiet compassion created a necessary glue. Others remained quietly confused as they searched conflicting beliefs in their hearts. There were as many responses as there were individuals. Systems have a way of reinforcing themselves by convincing people to distrust their humanity, and in doing so, distrust each other. As Arnaé and I discussed Carlton Reese's music and legacy, and the legacy of her own work, these same themes came to the fore. Who will we be in the face of a system that has been energized again against the people? Just like in the 1960s, the work of this moment requires a varied response. Each individual and community will choose who they are in the struggle, and what they will do. Reese reminds us that whatever that is, we've all got a job to do. Arnaé, inspired by Fannie Lou Hamer, reminds us that we are all in this together. Even though some people are being directly targeted, we are all woven in the same tapestry: "none of us are free until all of us are free." This reality travels through the physical and the spiritual. It asks us to reach out with the depths of our compassion. Even as we each feel bombarded by the system, we are asked to remember that we are not alone, and that others need us too, just as we need them. Freedom, after all, is a concept that each generation must decide for itself. Arnaé's music, and Reese's music acknowledge these complexities by giving us music that inspires the body into action. As the music grooves, the message begins to take root in our souls. This is music to be sung, to be danced to, to become life philosophy by changing the air we breathe. Kayo's "We Shall Overcome" setting has a middle section centered on a promise that "someday we will become united," and a hope that we will be ready to unite with others when that moment comes. That moment is now, and every now to come. As we develop compassion, we find the seeds of freedom waiting for us to nurture them in our relationships. I am deeply grateful to Arnaé, Kayo, John, and all of the groups who helped share this event with their singers. The chance to commune with others, especially those who we get to be with less often, presents to us a gift of incredible proportions. Thank you all for being a part of this moment to recharge for the work ahead of us." ~ Dr. David Harris