

Lament and Live Together: A Letter to the Church in New England

*Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.
I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.
I am weary with my crying;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.
~ Psalm 69: 1-3*

Dear Church,

We write to you in hard days, after hard months, in a hard year, heading into a contentious election, with the potential for increasing conflict, infections, and winter. We write to you with deep concern for the well-being of the faithful and the wider communities we love and serve. As pandemics of COVID, white supremacy, and persistent inequality ravage and despair sets in, we hear the cry of the Psalmist across every generation. We are weary with crying, and we know you are, too.

We write to you with a call to lament and live together.

Our pain increases as national leaders have failed to acknowledge the depth of collective suffering from both the historic deaths from COVID19, and among Black people and communities of color from racist violence. Pain unseen, unacknowledged, and unaddressed festers. And so, we seek to name before God our honest complaint.

Lament is faithful. “During this season, as humanity is challenged by a global pandemic and the worldwide illness of racism, our true complaint is against sin and evil. This means we need to grow in deeper relationship with Christ. When we do, we become challenged to be more like him as we offer that vulnerable plea to God.”⁺

Lament is relational. When we know one another, we can share one another’s honest complaint. We know that God sees our pain. As the Church, we strive to see one another’s pain and lift it to the Lord in our collective lament.

Lament is transformative. Lament “repositions our grief in exchange for God’s grace and eventual glory. Lament can serve as a catalyst for our individual and communal healing, if we allow ourselves

⁺ from [“There is a Balm in Gilead: A Call to Lament Together”](#) by Emmett G. Price III in the book *A Time for Sorrow: Recovering the Practice of Lament in the Life of the Church*

the space and the time to be honest, vulnerable, and transparent.” We want this transformation for ourselves and our world.

You are holding so much. As bishops, heads of church, and regional Church leaders, we see and hear from you of the funerals postponed, the elders isolated, the children confused, the parents worn, the checkbooks empty, the feeding programs overtaxed, the unjust inequalities increasing. We are especially mindful of the burdens on part-time and bivocational pastors, and clergy serving in communities that have historically and systemically been denied equal access to resources, care, and opportunity. We know of the increasing deaths of despair.

We share your fatigue and want to break from the silence and stoicism. Jesus’s heart breaks along with yours and ours. We have come to deep waters and are weary of crying. We are waiting for God.

And so, Beloved Church, we want to suggest the following across the Body of Christ in New England, and among any who wish to join:

1. Deliberate Resetting of Expectations in Local Churches

Every local church has made massive adaptations over the last seven months to proclaim the Gospel and care for the people. This enormous, creative work deserves praise, and it has come at a cost. Many clergy and lay leaders are heavy with decision fatigue and exhaustion. We invite every local church to adjust expectations for new or sustained programming in Advent, Christmas, Watch Night and into 2021. We too vow to reset our expectations for what is possible in this time.

2. Rebuking of Perfectionism and Permission to Rest

Especially in this season of incredible stress and strain, we must rebuke the false gods of perfectionism. We know that the stakes are high in this nation, and many in our communities need material and spiritual resources. People turn to the Church for sustenance. And we cannot demand perfection of one another. We will only make it through if we are deliberate and intentional in keeping Sabbath and rest. Some programs will need to cease. Some projects will have to wait. Stop what is not essential. The Church has endured for 2000 years. It will endure if we cease some of our meetings for a while.

3. Intentional, Communal Call to Lament

We need to lament. We have been soaked in suffering, as a nation and a Church. Some communities have endured disproportionate death, through no fault of their own. We need to wail and grieve and pray together. We lament fully when we know one another’s suffering, and so we invite you to take the time to hear the struggles of your communities. We commend to you the Rev. Dr. Emmett G. Price III’s essay, [“A Call to Lament Together.”](#)

4. Sharing of Mental Health Resources and Commitment to Speak Publicly about Mental Health

Church, for our collective health and well-being even in these terrible days, we need to speak, preach, teach, and pray honestly about the increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and

addiction across the nation without shame or stigma. Clergy and caregivers are experiencing [secondary trauma](#), on top of our own losses.

Connecticut: To locate services by town, click [here](#).

Maine: visit [211maine.org](#) , call 211 or text your zip code to 898-211.

Massachusetts: [MassSupport.org](#) is a free, confidential mental health service.

New Hampshire: visit [211nh.org](#) or dial 211

Rhode Island: NAMI Rhode Island offers a number of resources [here](#).

Vermont: free, 24/7 support is available when you text "VT" to 741741. More [here](#).

Anyone, anywhere, anytime can call the [national disaster distress helpline](#) at 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

Please, share these resources and seek support.

On that day when all hope seemed lost, the women who accompanied Jesus from Galilee did the work to tenderly bury the dead, even under the violent threat of Empire. They did what was necessary. They stayed together. They rested on the Sabbath. And then, Resurrection came in the form of the empty tomb (Luke 23:55-56, 24:1-3). We who proclaim eternal life in Jesus Christ cling to the promise of our faith that Resurrection will come for us, too.

You have our profound gratitude, love, and prayers.

With hope in Resurrection and the Kingdom to come,

- The Rev. Thaddaeus B. Allen, Regional Minister, Northeastern Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- The Rev. Howard K. Burgoyne, Superintendent, The East Coast Conference of The Evangelical Covenant Church
- The Rev. T.J. DeMarco, Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Boston, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, Resident Bishop, New England Conference of the United Methodist Church
- The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, Ph.D., Bishop Diocesan, The Episcopal Church in Connecticut
- The Rev. Laura Everett, Executive Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches
- The Rev. Nick Fatato, Southern New England Ministry Network (Assemblies of God)
- The Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director, Maine Council of Churches

- The Rt. Rev. Douglas Fisher, Bishop Diocesan, Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts
- The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Bishop Diocesan, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
- The Rev. Jocelyn B. Gardner Spencer, President, Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ
- Bishop James Hazelwood, New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, Bishop Suffragan, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
- The Rev. Marilyn B. Kendrix, Bridge Conference Minister, Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ
- Mr. Woullard Lett, New England Regional Lead, Unitarian Universalist Association

- The Rev. Jocelyn Hart Lovelace, Presiding Elder, Boston Hartford District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church
- The Rev. Dr. Mary Day Miller, Executive Minister, The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts
- National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, New England
- Bruce Neumann, Presiding Clerk; and Noah Merrill, Secretary; New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers)
- The Rev, Donald Remick, Bridge Conference Minister, Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ
- The Rev. Dr. Harry L. Riggs, II, Executive Minister, The American Baptist Churches of Connecticut
- Bishop Talbert W. Swan, II Jurisdictional Prelate, Nova Scotia Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, Church of God in Christ
- The Rev. Chontell N. Washington, Interim Executive Minister, Rhode Island State Council of Churches
- The Rev. Jason Wells, Executive Director, New Hampshire Council of Churches
- The Rev. Dr. David Wright, Esq., Executive Director, Black Ministerial Alliance of Greater Boston