



How is lament included in worship?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.

We always lament

According to Luke 23:27, believers have lamented – “the women were wailing for him” – since the day of Christ’s crucifixion. Lament is included in most Christian worship, although often in a hidden way. In the Lord’s Prayer, the petitions “save us from the time of trial” and “deliver us from evil” imply that suffering and distress always threaten our wellbeing. Christians have learned lament from the Psalms, some of which, like Psalm 88, are wholly lamentation. Others, such as Psalm 22, include both lament and praise. The Christmas psalms 96 and 98 acknowledge our societal injustices when praising God for “coming to judge the earth.” Even in the beloved Psalm 23, worshipers are walking “through the darkest valley.”

Many worship services open with Confession and Forgiveness, a minimal lament that speaks sorrow for personal and corporate sin. We also express lament in the comprehensive Confession of Sin on Ash Wednesday, in occasional use of the Great Litany, in hymns that plead for healing and peace, and in singing the historic biblical spirituals, as well as within pastoral care and during private devotion. Martin Luther viewed such expressions of grief as appropriate signs of our helplessness before God.

We are adding more laments

Our assemblies have known international, national, and local sadness and disaster. Faced with terrorism, armed conflict, random gun violence, riots, systemic injustices, abusive prejudices, migrant crises, ecological damage, weather calamities, pestilence, pandemic, and in some places, congregational tragedy, churches have sought for sustained and explicit rituals of communal lament. Communal laments may consist of only a single appropriate prayer, while others employ a leader’s text that specifies the problem, with the assembly’s easily repeatable refrain. Like the psalms, the text may rely on metaphors of misery. Yet truthfulness concerning the situation is required, and circumlocutions are to be avoided. The lament may ask participants to confess their role in perpetrating such sorrows. The lament may include biblical references, a short musical refrain, or a full

hymn. A call to hope may conclude the prayer but ought not erase the intensity of the lament. Assemblies must balance the power of silence with the reality of participating children. The assembly's musician(s) is an integral part of planning laments, since significant for lament are the communal singing of hymns or of repetitive chants, solo or choir contributions to the rite, and periods of instrumental music.

We lament on Sundays and throughout the week

At regular Sunday worship, such laments may take place as the opening rite, in a second prayer of the day, in an expanded praying of the psalm of the day. and with a Thanksgiving at the Table in which sorrow is interleaved with joy. A lament hymn may be sung in various places during worship. Each petition in the prayers of intercession can include lament, so that sorrow in the church, calamity in nature, violence and injustice between and within nations, widespread sickness, and prevailing heartache can be expressed. Accompanying images of a suffering humanity might be displayed or projected. Many lectionary readings include some reference to communal or personal adversity which the sermon or intercessions could attend to. The congregation's cultural style may prefer to express lament with either solemn stillness or loud outcries of grief.

A congregation's life affords other situations for communal lament. The cultural practice of holding Celebrations of Life ought not dismiss the value of classic funeral rites. Midweek Advent and Lenten services may be devoted to lament. Bible study sessions and committee meetings may open with a short, pertinent lament. Retreats can focus on a biblical and theological discussion of Christian lament and conclude with a sustained devotion of lament. Home devotions that rely on the calendar of commemorations in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* remind us of worldwide situations of suffering and call for our daily lament.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship includes many helpful resources for communal lament, including short prayers on many specific issues, the Great Litany (ELW #238), and hymns in the Lament section and throughout the collection. Most helpful is the 2020 publication, *All Creation Sings*, which in its pew and its leaders editions includes extensive rituals of lament and prayers on contemporary issues, as well as about 16 new hymns of lament, and even a Thanksgiving at the Font in times of drought or flood. That Christians join together regularly to plead for a suffering world is a blessed sign of baptismal unity in the body of Christ.

RESOURCES

[Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website](#)

- 📖 *Principles for Worship*. (See especially “Language and the Assembly.”) Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. (Available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#))

[Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress](#)

- 📖 *All Creation Sings*. Pew and Leaders editions. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2020.
- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Pew and leaders editions. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.

- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pastoral Care*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.
- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Occasional Services for the Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.
- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Prayer Book for the Armed Services*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013.
- 📖 *Hear My Voice: A Prison Prayer Book*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2019.
- 📖 *In These and Similar Words: Crafting Language for Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015.
- 📖 Ramshaw Gail. *More Days for Praise: Festivals and Commemorations in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016.
- 📖 Ramshaw, Gail. *Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks: A Collection of Litanies, Laments, and Thanksgivings at Font and Table*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2017.

Other Resources

- 📖 Billman, Kathleen D. and Daniel L. Migliore. *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006.
- 📖 Eklund, Rebekah. *Practicing Lament*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2021.
- 📖 "Liturgy and Violence." Vol. 52:3, *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts*. Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2019.

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