

Listening to **Longings & Losses**

A Spiritual Practice of Lament

Many clergy and congregations long for their ministry to look differently than it currently does. Some want things to look like they “used to.” Others want to see changes in how the congregation is led, who participates, or what the congregation focuses on.

Many clergy and congregations fear they are going to lose something important to them (or have lost something important) as the congregation faces the future. These fears are a reality for congregations who have questions about whether or not they will exist for another generation. These fears are also a reality in congregations that are stable or thriving and want to keep things going the way they are into the future. These fears of loss can prevent congregations from pursuing faithful innovation.

This spiritual practice invites participants to enter into a process of lamenting these longings and losses. Lamenting can create space for grieving losses and building trust in God’s direction for the future.

Questions about Longings and Losses

What's one wish you have for your congregation?

What's something that used to happen (or used to be true) in the congregation that you wish would return?

What's one thing you fear might be lost as your congregation moves into the future?

What's something that has changed that you feel is a loss in the life of the congregation?

Lamenting Longings and Losses

Address God

Participants are invited to direct their lament to God, drawing God into conversation about their longings and losses as a prayer.

Complaint

Participants name together what they long for and wish was true about their congregation and name their losses and fears about what has been or could be. These complaints are about God ("you"), ourselves ("I"), and other people ("they").

Confession

Participants are invited to confess their need for God's grace and forgiveness in their lives.

Ask God for Help

Participants name what they want God to do for them. They express their longings and losses as a request.

Affirm Trust in God

Participants affirm their trust in God and God's leadership over the future of their congregation. They imagine the shape God's faithfulness will take.

Promise to Praise God

Participants promise to praise God for who God is, what God has done in the past, and what God will do in the future.

Worksheet for Lamenting Longings and Losses

Address God

Name God in a powerful way:

Complaint

You complaint—How do you feel God has failed you?

They complaint—How do you feel others have failed you?

I complaint—How do you feel you have failed?

Confession

Ask for God's grace and mercy:

Ask God for Help

Ask for God's help as concretely as possible:

Affirm Trust in God

What picture can you imagine of God's faithfulness?

Promise to Praise God

What praise will you offer after God has shown up?