

Service of Lament, Confession, and Hope

Sponsored by the
General Commission on the Status and Role of Women
April 29, 2024

Call to Prayer

La Lucha

Mark A. Miller

En la lucha hay vida,
en la lucha esperanza.
En la lucha hay vida;
¡siempre hay, siempre hay esperanza!

In the struggle there is life,
in the struggle there is hope.
In the struggle there is life;
there is always hope!

¡Cantamos en la lucha!
¡Cantamos por la justicia!
Cantamos por nuestras vidas;
¡siempre hay, siempre hay esperanza!

We sing in the struggle!
We sing for justice!
We sing for our lives;
there is always hope!

Welcome

Welcome, siblings in Christ, to a gathering of truth-telling. We tell the truth of the survivors of sexual misconduct and abuse in the United Methodist Church. We tell the truth about the harm committed and the complicity of laity and clergy at all levels of the Church in allowing sexual harassment, misconduct, and abuse to continue. This is also a time of telling the truth about God, God's love that redeems and sustains us.

Lament

Leader: Throughout the Bible, prophets, leaders, and psalmists engage in lament as an act of individual and communal grief that points us back to God, back to our identity as God's children, back to the way of love in a world so full of violence and suffering. And so today, we join our voices to lament the acts and impact of sexual misconduct and abuse in The United Methodist Church.

All: To the women, children, and men harmed by clergy, lay leadership, and laity who hid behind United Methodist polity and the Christian faith to justify their actions and avoid accountability...

Leader: We believe you, and we lament the wounds you have endured.

All: To survivors whose honor and courage to speak out and tell their stories have been met with silencing, dismissal, disbelief, misnaming, and gaslighting...

Leader: We believe you, and we lament the mistreatment of your voice and story.

All: To all who have experienced the breaking of trust and integrity that results from those who commit sexual misconduct and those who refuse to hold abusers accountable...

Leader: We believe you, and we lament the rupture of trust, integrity, and community that comes from our action and inaction.

All: To all who cannot tell their stories of pain, abuse, and betrayal out of fear of retribution, a concern to keep the peace, or because speaking their story is too painful...

Leader: We believe you, and we lament the pain and suffering you carry in silence.

All: To all who are weary and worn down from witnessing and testifying to the harm individuals, committees, and policies in The United Methodist Church have done to our fellow siblings in Christ...

Leader: We believe you, and we lament how heavy it is to work for justice and mercy in our world and our church.

Quiet Meditation

Leader: Now let us hold space for a moment quiet of meditation as we allow our lament to begin a transformation within our church.

One minute of individual, quiet reflection.

Leader: As the music plays, you are invited to light a candle and place it on the altar as a sign of our solidarity with one another as we listen to, believe, and honor the voices of survivors and advocates.

Confession

Leader: When we confess, we claim responsibility for our complicity and contributions to injustice, injury, and abuse experienced by others before God and one another, trusting that God receives our confession and guides us toward meaningful, long-lasting, and restorative repentance. Therefore, let us confess our sins to God and one another:

Merciful God,

We confess that we have not loved you with our whole hearts.

We have failed to protect the innocent, empower the marginalized,

listen to the voices of your children when they tell us of sexual abuse happening within our church, and always respond by holding persons accountable and providing healing.

Response: God, forgive.

We have not done your will. We have allowed polity, political correctness, false propriety, and protection of the institutional Church to keep us from holding abusers accountable, thus

perpetuating harm within our local churches and damaging the whole United Methodist connection.

Response: God, forgive.

We have broken your law and rebelled against your love. We have normalized boundary violations and permitted the misuses of power that lead to sexual misconduct. We have twisted your teachings on how to love one another into permission for misconduct of all kinds to spread unchecked behind closed doors and out in the open among our laity and clergy.

Response: God, forgive.

We have not loved our neighbors. We have let our discomfort with the truth keep us from building your peaceable kin-dom together. We have swept information under the rug, spun stories to try to minimize the public perception of harm, and refused to put survivors at the head of the tables in charge of accountability and healing.

Response: God, forgive.

We have not listened to the cries of survivors. We have doubted their stories, ignored their wounds, and refused to tend to their pain. We have not created a culture of safety so that those whose wounds remain hidden can finally experience the security they need to make their stories known.

Response: God, forgive.

Time for quiet reflection.

Merciful God,

**forgive us, we pray,
and free us for courageous leadership.
In the name of Jesus Christ,
the Risen Messiah, who raises us
to live in God's peace and truth.
Amen.**

Scripture Reading

Psalm 23 (MSG)

God, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing.

You have bedded me down in lush meadows,

you find me quiet pools to drink from.

True to your word,

you let me catch my breath

and send me in the right direction.
Even when the way goes through
Death Valley,
I'm not afraid
when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd's crook
makes me feel secure.
You serve me a six-course dinner
right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.
Your beauty and love chase after me
every day of my life.
I'm back home in the house of God
for the rest of my life.

Call to Accountability

Leader: Siblings in Christ, in our lament we join our voices to sing in the midst of struggle as we affirm the stories of pain and suffering women, children, and men have experienced due to sexual misconduct. In our confession, we join our voices to sing for justice as we tell the truth of our own complicity in the perpetuation of sexual misconduct and abuse in The United Methodist Church. In both of these acts, we recognize that we have a long way to go to repair trust, restore integrity, and tend the wounds of those who have been harmed by our church. Thus, we call one another and the whole denomination to repentance by first calling us to accountability.

And so, I ask you:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,
reject the evil powers of this world,
and repent of your sin?

We do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves?

We do.

Will you model your life after Jesus,
Living and leading with integrity in
All your relationships within and outside
Of The United Methodist Church?

We will.

Will you join those who have gone or are going through Death Valley as fellow companions on the road, choosing not to turn away from their pain, but to remain attentive and come alongside them as you follow the Good Shepherd?

We will.

Will you listen to and believe the stories of survivors of sexual misconduct and abuse, committing yourself to seeking truth and justice for all persons, no matter their status, power, or influence within and outside The United Methodist Church?

We will.

Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life?

With God's help, we will proclaim the good news with our lives according to the example of Christ.

We will surround survivors with a community of love and accountability.

We will work together to build God's kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven, that we may come home to God and one another in a community of safety, accountable action, restored integrity, and responsive love.

Song

No Room for Silence

Lindy Thompson

1. No room for silence,
no room for waiting,
all our pretending
now in the past.

We will not wait for
others' permission,
now will our voices
be raised at last.

2. Bodies are blessings,
honest by nature,
sending us warnings,
truth from inside.

Gifts of God's goodness,
ours for a lifetime;
whether to share them,
ours to decide.

3. God brings us healing,
God gives us wholeness,
hope for the future,
growth from the past.

We are arising,
we are united,
voices combining,
hear us at last.

Benediction

Beloved, go now in the company of the Triune God, knowing that when the truth gets uncomfortable, and we're bumbling our way into accountability, and the stories of survivors become an overwhelming flood—*this* is the work of setting the tables in God's kin-dom home. And so, may God's blessing and never-ending love go with you now and always as we work together for accountability, responsibility, and reconciliation as we make our way home to God and one another. Amen.

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Worship Leader: Rev. Stephanie Arnold, (First UMC Birmingham, Alabama)
Music Leader: Rev. Dr. Lydia Muñoz, (National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry)
Readers: Dr. Diana Sanchez-Bushong (Discipleship Ministries), Chris Wilterdink (Discipleship Ministries), Aileen Delgado (Mountain Sky Annual Conference), Rev. Kalamba Kilumba (West Ohio Annual Conference), Jenn Ferariza Meneses (Board of Women's Work, Philippines Central Conference).

Tyler Ward and Deanne Lynch (North Georgia Annual Conference) for providing and creating the elements of the altarscape.

All COSROW volunteers from the Western North Carolina and North Carolina Annual Conferences.

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No Room for Silence
lyrics by Lindy Thompson
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