The Episcopal Church in Vermont
Together in Christ...growing locally, serving globally

A Service of
Lament: Marking the Deaths of More than
100,000 Americans in this Time of Pandemic

The people gather, and a candle is lit, representing the first 10,000 who died. Silence is held.

Voice: “How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she that was great among the nations!” (Lamentations 1:1)

Voice: New York, 29,529; New Jersey, 11,409; Massachusetts, 6,640; Pennsylvania, 5,373; Michigan, 5,372

Leader: O God, Creator of the universe, we stand before you as fragile humans, made only of earthy clay and Your breath. In all humility, we hold to you all those who are sick with the coronavirus, who are COVID positive, and all those who care for them and work intimately for their healing. We name the sick and hold them in Your healing light, O Lord. Hear our prayer.

A second candle is lit, representing the second 10,000 who died. Silence is held.

Voice: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” (Matthew 2:18)

Voice: Illinois, 5,186; California, 3,993; Connecticut, 3,286; Louisiana, 2,741; Maryland, 2,428

Leader: In all humility, we turn to our God today to honor our dead. We have had no time, no space, no moment to mourn. We made promises to love and protect our families, “till death do us part.” In their final days, we are heart-broken that we were apart from those who were dying. May they forgive us. May we forgive ourselves. We claim in faith that we are born from God, we live for God, and we return to God. We seek rest and time in you. Hear our prayer.

A third candle is lit, representing the next 10,000 who died. Silence is held.

Voice: “My companions and neighbors you have put away from me, and hidden my friends out of my sight.” (Psalm 88:18)

Voice: Florida, 2,364; Ohio, 2,098; Indiana, 2,068; Georgia, 1,973; Texas, 1,611
Leader: O God, you are the Keeper of the Book of Life, and no one dies alone—but all under your loving gaze. So that their passing is not an empty data point on death’s grim graph, let us say the names of those who have died and to remember them. [Name the names of the dead here.] Into your hands, O Lord, we commend their spirits. **Hear our prayer.**

_A fourth candle is lit, representing the next 10,000 who died. Silence is held._

**Voice:** “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” *(Romans 12:15)*

**Voice:** Colorado, 1,421; Virginia, 1,338; Washington, 1,106; Minnesota, 977; North Carolina, 876

**Leader:** Give us the gift of weeping, O God, for tears of love are always holy. It is not only our loved ones who are lost, but our jobs, our neighborhoods, our familiarity with family, and graduations and classes. May our mourning, lamenting, remembering, and learning from these losses not disappear like water in sand, but push us to weep from time to time. Keep us tenderhearted, we pray. **Hear our prayer.**

_A fifth candle is lit, representing the next 10,000 who died. Silence is held._

**Voice:** “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” *(Ephesians 4:1-2)*

**Voice:** Arizona, 860; Missouri, 708; Mississippi, 693; Rhode Island, 677; Alabama, 591

**Leader:** As we Americans face together this unprecedented season, let love fill all our hearts, so that the greatness of our nation continues to break open before us. Draw every American into the values of courage, duty, honorable action, self-sacrifice, generosity, neighborliness, responsibility, and mercy, which are the hallmarks of our country. Give us courage, O Lord. **Hear our prayer.**

_A sixth candle is lit, representing the next 10,000 who died. Silence is held._

**Voice:** “May your way may be known upon earth, your saving health among all nations.” *(Psalm 67:2)*

**Voice:** Wisconsin, 550; Iowa, 506; South Carolina, 470; District of Columbia, 453; Kentucky 409
Leader: To those who have lost loved ones, we—your fellow citizens—offer you comfort, not condolence, empathy, not sympathy. As a people we have borne this pandemic’s cost in the lives of our families; as a nation we shall honor and mourn them together. Let peace and good health prevail among all the nations, O God, and may it be so in our own families, communities, states, and land on this day and each day to come. These families are your families, O Lord. **Hear our prayer.**

*A seventh candle is lit, representing the next 10,000 who died. Silence is held.*

**Voice:** “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” *(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

**Voice:** Nevada, 406; Tennessee, 356; Delaware, 345; New Mexico, 335; Oklahoma, 326

Leader: Jesus knew what we numb ones must always learn again: that weeping must be real because endings are real; and that weeping permits newness. Christ’s weeping with us permits the kingdom to come. The Holy Spirit’s indwelling opens us to envision a new “normal,” to envision an America true to her dreams, true to our native land to have a new birth of freedom and justice for all. Lord, open our eyes to a new and holy vision that your people may be your people in the days to come. Make us brave, O Lord, together. **Hear our prayer.**

*An eighth candle is lit, representing the next 10,000 who died. Silence is held.*

**Voice:** “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” *(John 15:12)*

**Voice:** New Hampshire, 232; Kansas, 214; Nebraska 163; Oregon, 151; Puerto Rico, 131

Leader: All this has happened, Lord God, but we have not forgotten your promise to be with us in trouble and deliver us. Forgive the sin of our nation for the disproportionate number of people of color among the fallen, victimized by health care inequities and the unbearable burden of systemic racial injustice. Give us strength to change, O Lord. **Hear our prayer.**

*A ninth candle is lit, representing the next 10,000 who died. Silence is held.*

Voice: Arkansas, 125; Utah, 106; Maine 84; Idaho, 82; West Virginia, 74
Leader: God of wisdom, surely in the halls of divine justice you are assembling the courts, calling witnesses to testify, to proclaim the compassion of some and the callousness of others as we’ve struggled to cope. The souls taken too soon, whose funerals were lonely, who didn’t need to die, who died alone, will tell their stories when You judge our triumphs and our failures in these hours of need. Lord, forgive our selfish ways. **Hear our prayer.**

*A tenth candle is lit, representing the next 14,216 who died. Silence is held.*

Voice: North Dakota, 57; Vermont, 55; South Dakota, 54; Montana, 17; Wyoming, 15; Alaska 10; US Virgin Islands, 10; Guam, 5; Northern Mariana Islands, 2; Other Territories, 3

Leader: In the days ahead, we ask you Lord, to wrap loving arms around those left only with fleeting memories of warm smiles, joy-filled laughter, spirit-lifting hugs, the matchless pleasure of special days celebrated, and contributions to a better world now ended. You, alone, O God, can turn our mourning into dancing and our grief into joy over the sweet remembrance of our beloved. May you now rest their souls. In your blessed name, Lord God, we pray. **Amen.**

*A final candle is lit for all the unnamed and unknown dead*

*A musical reflection*

Leader: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw a holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’” (Revelation 21:1-4)

Go forth in peace, be kind to one another, be gracious and loving to all whom you meet; protect the down-trodden, feed the hungry, pray for the sick. And may the almighty and merciful Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us. **Amen.**
Scripture and prayers compiled from Sojourners (sojo.net/day-of-lament/prayers) and used with permission.