

“My heart within me is appalled”

A Liturgy for a community in shock and grief after violence or accident

A liturgy incorporating “elements of a number of occasions when local churches have responded to community events by gathering people to lament, grieve and reclaim hope”, included in

How Liturgy cares for Us in Personal and Communal Settings

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Rev Colleen O’Reilly, 1996

Psalm 143:4b. The full text of v.4 is

*Therefore my spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is appalled.*

This text has been chosen to convey the sense of shock, disbelief, grief and outrage which sudden violence or loss of life causes for both individuals and whole communities, including a nation. O’Reilly, p.243

“My heart within me is appalled”

A Liturgy for a community in shock and grief after violence or accident

GATHERING: *(The Leader says these or similar words.)*

Friends, we have come together today to remember the terrible and tragic events which have happened in our community. Our hearts are appalled within us and we reach out to God and to each other.

We come to affirm that even in the midst of this tragedy we can continue as a community, supporting one another and rekindling our hope in the goodness of God’s gift of life together.

Separately we received the news of these events and separately the victims fell. In the silence of shock we heard the appalling news, and in our grief we do not know what to say, except to ask “Why?”

Together we will give voice to our lament, for silence will not heal us, nor will our silence lead to a renewed community.

Together now we are taking a step to heal and give testimony to our desire for a healed community. It is God who cares for us, who will bring us the healing and comfort we seek.

Let us now ask God for this gift.

HYMN¹: Psalm 23 “The Lord is my Shepherd”

SCRIPTURE READINGS: *(These need to be chosen according to circumstance.)*

HOMILY:

The emphasis should remain on the healing of the community in the light of the events, and expressions of God’s engagement with us through God’s compassion and love.

PRAYERS:

Leader: Let us pray with confidence to God who heals the past, directs the present and calls us into the future.
We pray for this community of N.
Through the bond of our common humanity, draw us together and make us one.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

Leader: We pray for all the communities of which we are a part, the neighbourhoods, families and friendships in which we share.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

Leader: We acknowledge our lack of concern when these things have happened elsewhere.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

Leader: Nurture in us a sense of the common good and a willingness to work for justice and peace.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

Leader: Save us from anger and a desire for vengeance.
Do not let us keep silence when it is time to speak for change.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

Leader: We pray for all who support and strengthen us;
uphold all who work in the support services of this community.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

Leader: We pray for all victims of violence,
especially those who died or were injured here.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

Leader: We pray for all who are grieving the loss of those they love.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

Leader: We pray that you will restore our trust in the goodness of life together.
May our memorial to those who have died be our willingness to seek healing,
justice and peace in this community.

People: Hear us, and heal us, O God.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: ²

Our father,
Who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
Thy Kingdom come;

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;

And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us;

And lead us not in to temptation,
But deliver us from evil;
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.

AMEN.

ACT OF RECLAIMING HOPE:

Leader: We cannot live and grow
when the memory of the past overwhelms us and keeps us in fear.
So now let us, God, who is goodness and love in our midst,
come before you to deliver us from anxiety and fear
and to give us hope in a new future together.

Let us pray for God's blessing
- upon this tree to be planted in this public place,
and upon these seeds
- we will take with us from here. ³

Let us reclaim this public space for our community, that once more
it may be a place of safety as we share life together here.

(A time of silence may be kept.)

Let us pray.

Holy God,
you know the deepest desires of our hearts before we ask,
and your will for us is that we should live in peace together.
Look with compassion on our broken and distressed community.
Heal the wounds of minds and bodies
and restore us to hope and trust.
Release us from fear of past events and deliver this place
from the power of evil and the memory of violence.
As this tree stands in our midst, plant in us a love of peace,
a love of each other, and a love of You.
Hallow this place and bless this tree and seeds that with them,
we may grow towards your image in us.
We ask this in your name and in your strength.

People: **AMEN.**

Leader: As a sign of the peace we seek,
let us greet one another in peace.

Please exchange a sign of peace with each other.

HYMN or other music/drama ⁴

DEPARTURE:

Leader: We have gathered together to remember the victims of
and to reclaim our life together in this community.
We go from here,
not forgetting what has occurred but with a renewed desire for all
that builds our life together.
As a sign of our willingness to nurture the tender shoots of new life,
we take these seeds to our homes for planting.
May God uphold us and restore us
and keep us from all harm.

May God have compassion on our community
and give us back trust and hope.

May God go before us, teaching us what is right
and may we walk the paths of peace.

May God bless you and strengthen you,
and send you out from here as bearers of peace.

People: We go in peace, we go in hope.

NOTES:

1. *Singing together early in the liturgy has the effect of creating an assembly of those who have gathered. Psalm 23, to the tune of Crimond, is a hymn with the virtue of being widely known by most people. Its familiarity is a significant contribution to this liturgy.*
2. *The form printed here is that most likely to be familiar to the largest number of people attending a liturgy of this type.*
3. *Each Order of Service will have a seed of the same type to be taken away and planted elsewhere by those attending.*
4. *Singing together is a good way to conclude but it is important that any tune chosen should be well known and the words simple and relevant to what has occurred in the community. It may be possible to have music provided by a local choir or ensemble group, or a dramatic interpretation of the community's experience. The guiding principle in choices for this liturgy should be the pastoral care of people who may have firm, feeble or no faith, yet have gathered in response to the mystery of suffering and are searching for authentic hope. It is important to do all that is possible to enable people to participate without feeling confused or inept in the situation.*