

# THOSE WHO DREAM

## A LONGEST NIGHT GATHERING LITURGY & LEADERSHIP GUIDE

*for a Holiday Service of Remembrance & Grief*

Written by Lenora & Gary Rand of Plural Guild  
Featuring Original Music by The Many

We invite you to implement this service as-is, or adapt it for your context. Either way, please attribute credit as follows: Liturgy by Lenora & Gary Rand | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

## INTRODUCTION

### *About the Service*

There's an Advent tradition within Western Christianity of inviting people to come together for the Longest Night, a night around the time of the winter solstice, when there are more hours of darkness than light. It's a time to come together for prayers and laments, to mourn the losses and griefs of the year, to let the tears flow for the hurting places in our own lives, as well as for our country and our world. Known also as "Blue Christmas," a Longest Night Gathering is a safe and sacred space to share anguish, to plead with God to remember us, to pray for justice and restoration, even to hope against hope, through our doubts and tears and fears, that "God will set things right all over the earth."<sup>2</sup>

For this Longest Night Gathering, we've written a liturgy which you can use as-is or adapt for your congregation in any way you see fit. We've suggested some places where you may want to add in some names and specifics from your community. This liturgy does not include a homily because we've found by keeping the focus on hearing the word of God through scriptures of lament and music, people can stay in touch with their heart versus moving into their head and more easily express their sorrows. We've formatted the liturgy and readings for two voices, but you could easily incorporate many more readers to include more worship leaders.

We've put this gathering together with the idea that you may be meeting in a socially distanced way, thus we've tried to offer ways for people to participate in this ritual of lament without having to sit close together or touch each other. If you're only meeting virtually, you could also use this liturgy as a starting place for creating an online worship experience. The readings and responses could be recorded ahead of time, and you could invite people to share their laments in the comments. If you are unable to sing together, we have provided sheet music for soloists, as well as many recorded options.

<sup>1</sup> We encourage you to use this title if you are in the Southern Hemisphere.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 2:10, The Message Translation.

# INTRODUCTION (CONT.)

## *About the Lament Wreath*

Throughout the service, the liturgy provides an option for worshipers to write prayers of lament on pieces of cloth and then rend them. Ushers will collect the strips and tie them to form a beautiful “rag wreath” of laments. We created a mockup of the wreath by using beautiful scrap fabric in different hues and textures and tying the strips around a wisteria wreath.

If you are worshiping virtually, you could distribute materials to your community for them to create their own wreaths at home during the service. Or, you could collect the torn prayer strips after the virtual gathering for project leaders to tie the strips onto one, larger communal wreath.



## *Materials*

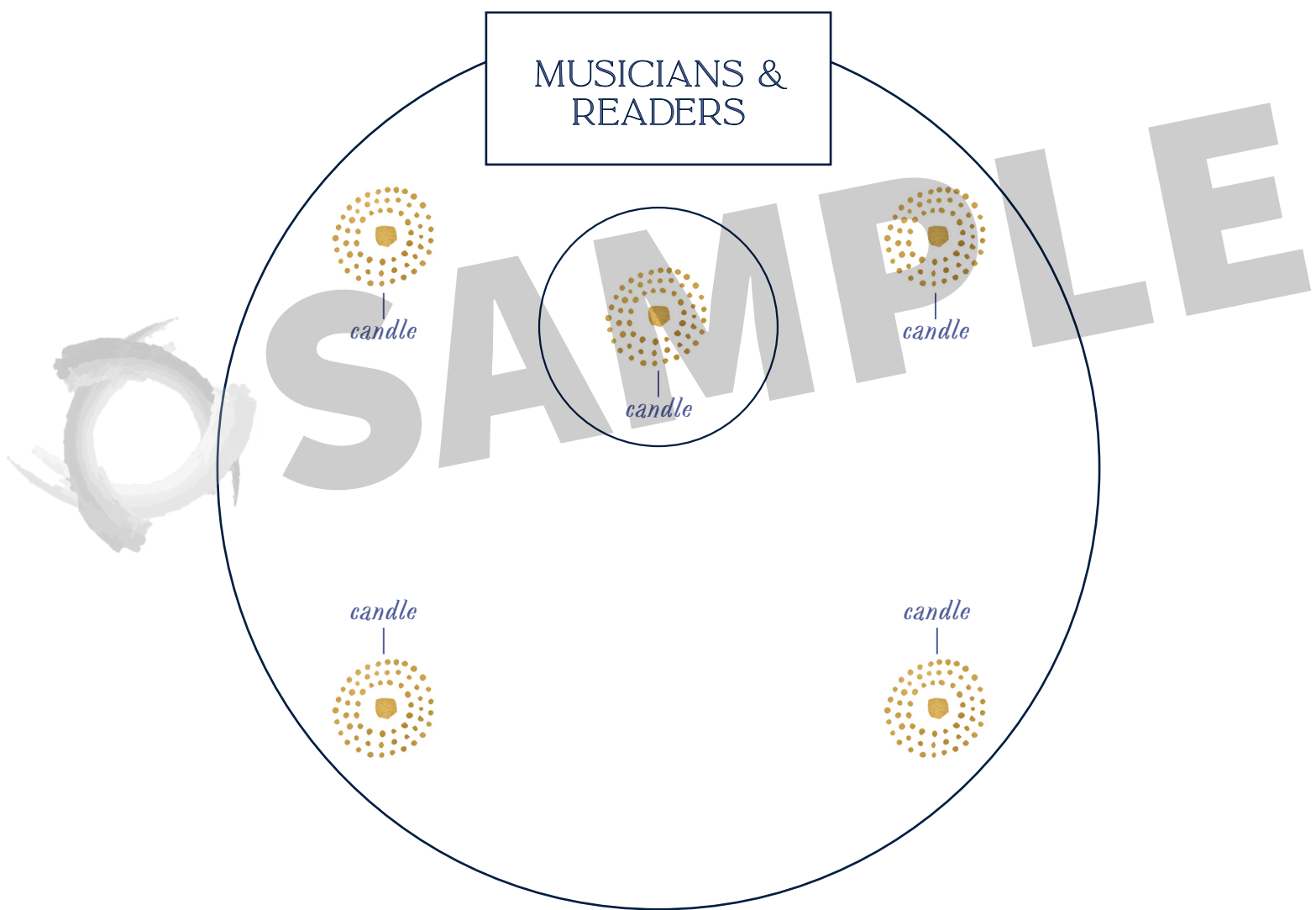
- \* **A wire or wooden wreath frame**, about 16-24 inches in diameter, to create an Advent wreath made from the laments of your people. If you are worshiping virtually and inviting your community to create smaller wreaths at home, you might purchase and distribute smaller [brass macrame rings](#).
- \* **Pieces of cloth**, 4-6 inches wide and 6-8 inches long. Varying the width and length of the strips will create a more visually interesting wreath. Cut and gather enough for everyone in attendance to have four pieces in various shades of purple, blue, or even gold. Score each cloth piece in the middle for easy tearing in half. If you can, you could repurpose any scrap fabric you might have in a church closet. We have found that synthetic blends tend to be easier to tear than natural or cotton blends. Whatever you use, test the fabric by tearing it a few times to make sure it will work.
- \* **4 dark blue and purple pillar candles**, 6-9 inches tall. We recommend removing other brighter or lighter colors from the space for this gathering. The deep rich blues and purples of the fabric and the candles can help reinforce the idea of embracing the beauty of the darkness.
- \* **1 taller purple or dark blue pillar candle for the “Christ” candle**,<sup>3</sup> 9-12 inches tall.
- \* **Matches or lighters** for the candles.
- \* **Black markers**, enough for everyone in attendance. We suggest washable ones, in case there’s any bleed-through as worshipers write on the fabric.
- \* **Baskets**, one for every usher who will be helping collect the torn strips of cloth.

<sup>3</sup> Though you might typically use a white candle for the center “Christ” candle, we hope you’ll use one of the darker candles for that. For too long in many churches we have associated “white” with Christ in our liturgical color choices and perhaps unintentionally reinforced “white Jesus,” “white is better” or “whiteness is holiness” kind of thinking. A dark colored, or even black, Christ candle affirms that darkness is sacred too.

# INTRODUCTION (CONT.)

## *Setting*

As you prepare your space, keep in mind this is a night when we are encouraging everyone to embrace the darkness. So you might look at your overall lighting with an eye toward keeping the room as dimly-lit as possible, but making sure folks can still read their bulletins. This is not a gathering that has to happen in a sanctuary, and because of social distancing, it might be better if you held the event in a fellowship hall or some meeting space where the seating could be flexible. We suggest considering a circular "worship in the round" arrangement and putting the four candles you will be lighting during the moments of lament in the corners of the room, with a single Christ candle on a table in the center where it can be most visible to everyone.



# INTRODUCTION (CONT.)

## *Preparation*

Before the gathering begins, place four pieces of fabric and a washable marker on or below each seat. You may also wrap these together with a string with the bulletin for the evening and place them in a large basket by the entrance with a sign asking each person to take one. It's very important that each fabric is cut slightly in the middle to make it easier for people to "rend" it. Prior to the service, place candles in the four corners of the room, and place the Christ candle on a table in the center of the space. Leave the candles unlit, as you will light them throughout the service.

You will need at least 5 ushers to help pass out and collect supplies throughout the service, as well as process items at the end. You will also need two people, stationed in another room away from the service, tying the strips of fabric to the frame to create your rag wreath progressively throughout the service. Please keep the wreath outside of the worship space, not visible. Each time the community is prompted to rend their cloth strips, the ushers will come collect the strips in baskets and bring them to where the wreath makers are hidden away.

Once the Advent Wreath of Laments has been created, you may want to continue to use it as the Advent Wreath for your final services of the Advent season. You could mix in greenery with it, if you wished.

## *About the Liturgy Outline*

- \* Italicized lines are notes for worship leaders.
- \* Unbolded lines are to be spoken by worship leaders and, when appropriate, printed in bulletins or projected on screens.
- \* Bolded lines are to be spoken by the congregation and printed in bulletins or projected on screens.

# SUMMARY ORDER OF WORSHIP

## COMING TOGETHER

### **Prelude**

*Offered as an instrumental or sung by a soloist:*

"O Come, O Come Emmanuel" with alternative lyrics by Lenora & Gary Rand.

*Alternatively, you could also play either of these recorded songs quietly as people enter:*

"Coventry Carol" by Salt of the Sound

"Come to Us (Abide)" by Salt of the Sound

### **Welcome & Call to Worship**

### **Soloist or Communal Hymn**

*Music suggestions:*

"In Deepest Night" Music by Gary Rand. Lyrics by Susan Palo Cherwien.

"Longest Nights" by *The Many*

## SHARING OUR PRAYERS & LAMENTS / *We Do Not Lament Alone*

### Soloist or Communal Hymn

Music suggestions:

"Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child"

"Forsaken" by the *The Many*

## SHARING OUR PRAYERS & LAMENTS / *Grieving What We've Lost*

### Sung Response

After one minute of silence.

"Waiting for You," by *The Many*

## SCRIPTURE & RENDING / *Psalm 13*

### Sung Response

"Waiting for You," by *The Many*

## SCRIPTURE & RENDING / *Jeremiah 8*

### Soloist or Communal Hymn

Music suggestions:

"Remember When" by *The Many*

"Lovely Needy People" by *The Many*

"How Long, O God" (tune: MARTYRDOM)

## SHARING OUR PRAYERS & LAMENTS / *Racism & Injustice*

### Sung Response

"Waiting for You," by *The Many*

## SCRIPTURE & RENDING / *Jeremiah 31*

### Sung Response

"Waiting for You," by *The Many*

## SCRIPTURE & RENDING / *Psalm 102*

### Soloist or Communal Hymn

Music suggestions:

"Those Who Dream" by *The Many*

"Comfort, Comfort Ye My People"

## THE WORDS OF ASSURANCE

## SENDING

### Soloist or Communal Hymn

Music suggestions:

"Waiting for You" by *The Many*

"O Come, All Ye Faithful" with alternative lyrics by Lenora & Gary Rand

## FINAL BLESSING

## POSTLUDE

The final refrain of "Waiting for You," by *The Many*



# LITURGY FOR THE LONGEST NIGHT

### *Possible Quotes for Screens or Bulletins*

"I shall look at the world through tears. Perhaps I shall see things that dry-eyed I could not see."

–Nicholas Wolterstorff

"The mystery of the Biblical story is that God also laments."

–N.T. Wright

"A hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it...and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe."

–Ezekiel 2

"May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy."

–Psalm 126

## COMING TOGETHER

### Prelude

Offered as an instrumental or sung by a soloist:

"O Come, O Come Emmanuel" with alternative lyrics by Lenora & Gary Rand.<sup>4</sup>

Alternatively, you could also play either of these recorded songs quietly as people enter:

"Coventry Carol" by *Salt of the Sound*<sup>5</sup>

"Come to Us (Abide)" by *Salt of the Sound*<sup>6</sup>

## Welcome & Call to Worship

**Reader 1:** Good evening, and welcome to {insert church name here}.

Tonight is a night for us to be together in the dark. But, let's admit it, so often darkness scares us. Darkness is our nightmare. We've been taught to fear it, to avoid it, to keep the lights on, to think happy thoughts, to pretend everything's all right, and to not go into "that dark place."

4 "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Traditional verses adapted by Lenora and Gary Rand. Tune Veni Emmanuel. Public Domain. Find alternative lyrics in the accompanying documents.

5 "Coventry Carol." From *And on Earth*. By Salt of the Sound. 2019.

6 "Come to Us (Abide)" From *And on Earth*. By Salt of the Sound. 2019.