

A Witness from the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky to the 225th General Assembly (2022)

The Witness includes a written report, a new hymn of lament and hope, and additional worship resources on the theme of lament and hope. All of the resources are intended both for use in worship and as an example to be contextualized for your community and circumstances. We offer these resources not as final perfected liturgy but as living, breathing hymns and prayers that the Spirit will continue to shape in your context.

- Written report: <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000926>
- Come Bear Witness hymn video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wc-rjdfdpBs>
- Come Bear Witness SATB Score: https://pcbiz.s3.amazonaws.com/Uploads/5314ff03-006a-48ba-9e6e-5d16ebc623eb/Come_Bear_Witness_SATB_-_Score_2.pdf
- Liturgical resources on the theme of lament and hope: (see pages below)
 - Collects for Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday
 - The Solemn Reproaches of the Cross for Good Friday
 - Resources on lament and hope from the Book of Confessions
 - Litany of Lament and Hope

[Spanish language resources are coming.]

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Invitation to write a hymn stanza

We, the members of the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky faithfully affirm our identity and calling—we, too, are witnesses, both to lament and hope. The call to be a witness, or to bear witness is a call to all followers of Jesus. We invite you to join us in bearing witness by writing a stanza to the hymn “Come Bear Witness.”

Appalachian folk music and African American spirituals, like many musical traditions, change as they move from one musician to another, from one community to another. Mid-Kentucky Presbytery offers you this original hymn born out of our context. We invite you to write your own stanza(s)—from the work of your GA committee, from the perspective of your life, from the context of the community where you live.

The basic format is:

The question: eight syllables / repeated twice
Will you come bear witness with me?

The circumstances: seven syllables / three different phrases / each ending word *rhymes*

Ends with: Will you come bear witness with me?

Collects

Good Friday

Comforter of all who mourn,
we remember your son wept at the death of his dear friend Lazarus.
Be near to us as we grieve the death of all who are dear to us*
that we may look with hope
to the time when days of mourning shall be ended
and crying and pain will be no more.

* At this point in the prayer, liturgists might name, and/or invite worshipers to name people who have died in their community, including those who have died because of particularly violent situations: at the hands of the state; due to hatred of their nationality, the color of their skin, the people they love, or the queerness of their being; as a consequence of white nationalism; from gun violence.

Holy Saturday

God of all who wait,
let your steadfast love be upon us
filling our hearts with courage
so that we may not lose hope
in times of trouble
as we wait for the dawn of a new day.

Easter Sunday

God of the new day's dawning,
you walked with the women to the tomb.
They expected only death
and you astonished them with a reality
they could barely comprehend.
Meet us in this day
that even amidst bad news swirling around us
we too may experience your unexpected good news
filling our hearts with great joy.

The Solemn Reproaches of the Cross

The Solemn Reproaches of the Cross are an element of the Good Friday liturgy dating to the ninth century. They represent the lament of Christ to the church. The following litany uses the Solemn Reproaches as a model for prayer, incorporating particular laments identified in “A Witness from the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky.”

Worship planners are encouraged to adapt this model for their own contexts, using the following “formula” for each stanza of the prayer: (a) “I statement”—a biblical image of God’s faithfulness, (b) but “you statement”—a contemporary confession or lament ... (c) “and you have made a cross for your Savior.”

The Trisagion (“Holy God, Holy and Mighty”) or a Kyrie (“Lord, Have Mercy”) is sung or spoken after each set of reproaches. A time of silence may be included, as indicated by the ellipse (...).

O my people, O my church,
what more could I have done for you?
Answer me!

I called you by name
and sent you to be a light to the nations
but you stole the lands of the Cherokee,
Chickasaw, Delaware, Mosopelea,
Shawnee, Wyandot, and Yuchi Nations* ...
and you have made a cross for your Savior.

Lord, have mercy.

*or Holy God, Holy and mighty,
Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.*

I led my people through the sea
to deliver them from slavery to freedom
but you brought my children from Africa
and sold them down the Ohio River ...
and you have made a cross for your Savior.

Lord, have mercy.

I commanded you to welcome and care for
those who are newcomers in the land
but you met immigrants and refugees
with violence and exploitation ...
and you have made a cross for your Savior.

Lord, have mercy.

I came to reconcile you to one another,
speaking the truth in love
but you poison one another
with misinformation and distrust ...

and you have made a cross for your Savior.
Lord, have mercy.

I planted you in a garden of delight
and called you to be stewards of creation
but you have abused and neglected
the earth I made to be your home ...
and you have made a cross for your Savior.
Lord, have mercy.

I came to unite you as one body
and to break down dividing walls of hostility
but you allow structural racism
to divide your city into east and west ...
and you have made a cross for your Savior.
Lord, have mercy.

I claimed you as beloved children
in whom I am well pleased
but you discriminate against LGBTQIA siblings,
denying them the dignity and equality I desire ...
and you have made a cross for your Savior.
Lord, have mercy.

* Smartphone apps and websites, such as Native-Land.ca, can help worship planners identify indigenous lands in a particular geographical area.

Resources on Lament and Hope from the Book of Confessions

Below are suggestions from the Book of Confessions for affirmations of faith, prayers, content for preaching and teaching, and/or inspiration for creating additional liturgy with the themes of lament and hope.

The Confession of 1967 (Inclusive Language Text)

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/inclusive-language-version-confession-1967/>

9.25

The members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of all in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics. But they have to fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare. Their strength is in their confidence that God's purpose rather than human schemes will finally prevail.

9.32

[Christ's] crucifixion discloses to the church God's judgment on the inhumanity that marks human relations, and the awful consequences of the church's own complicity in injustice. In the power of the risen Christ and the hope of [Christ's] coming, the church sees the promise of God's renewal of human life in society and of God's victory over all wrong.

9.46

The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations. The church calls all people to use their abilities, their possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to them by God for the maintenance of their families and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise hopes for better conditions and provide them with opportunity for a decent living.

9.50

The church responds to the message of reconciliation in praise and prayer. In that response it commits itself afresh to its mission, experiences a deepening of faith and obedience, and bears open testimony to the gospel. Adoration of God is acknowledgment of the Creator by the creation. Confession of sin is admission of every person's guilt before God and of their need for God's forgiveness. Thanksgiving is rejoicing in God's goodness to all people and in giving for the needs of others. Petitions and intercessions are addressed to God for the continuation of divine goodness, the healing of human ills, and deliverance from every form of oppression. The arts, especially music and architecture, contribute to the praise and prayer of a Christian congregation when they help people to look beyond themselves to God and to the world which is the object of God's love.

9.53

It is the will of God that the divine purpose for human life shall be fulfilled under the rule of Christ and all evil be banished from creation.

9.55

With an urgency born of this hope [9.53-9.54], the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.

Confession of Belhar

10.3

We believe. . . that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways;
. . . that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity.

10.5

We believe. . . that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;

10.7

We believe . . . that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged
that God calls the church to follow God in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
. . . that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged;

A Brief Statement of Faith

The entire statement resonates with themes of lament and hope. Below are particular lines that offer easily spoken liturgical material.

We rebel against God; we hide from our Creator . . .

lines 33, 39-40, 47-51

We deserve God's condemnation.

Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation. . .

Loving us still,

God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.

Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.

In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit give us courage.
In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

lines 65-71

With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

line 77-79

A Litany of Lament and Hope

This litany is rooted in the double meaning of the word “confession.” In our worship, the confession often means a time to lament what is wrong in us and in our world. In our denominational documents, a confession is a statement of belief, of faith, of hope. By expressing both meanings of confession, this litany demonstrates the close relationship between lament and hope. It draws upon laments and hopes that were named in the “Witness from Mid-Kentucky Presbytery,” as well as from our Book of Confessions. We encourage you to spend time in your communities discerning what it is you might confess in lament and hope, and to root those in your own meditations on our Book of Confessions. Consider writing your own version of this litany, alternating laments and hopes – with hopes inspiring laments, and laments inspiring hopes.

God of steadfast love,
through the Psalms you teach us to hold lament and hope together.¹
Together our prayers of lament and hope
reveal the gap between the world as it is
and the world for which we wait with eager longing and faithful patience.²
We lament because hope remembers your faithfulness
and looks toward your promises fulfilled,
through which we recognize that all is not yet as it should be.
We hope because lament is rooted in the belief that something is wrong
and that things could be better.

Because we hope for the manifested unity of your people, expressed in suffering with one another, praying together, serving together, and struggling together for your righteousness...³

We lament the loss of community and connection and the increase of isolation and loneliness in a time when we've been remote and socially distanced.

Because we lament the polarization of our times, the “othering” of our neighbors, and the scorn for the common good...

We hope for your life-giving Word and Spirit to conquer the powers of sin and death, irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, and to enable your people to live into new possibilities of life.⁴

¹ In particular, Psalm 18, Psalm 77, and Psalm 119

² Romans 8:18-25

³ Confession of Belhar, 10.3

⁴ Confession of Belhar, 10.5

Because we hope for a church that unmask idolatries in church and culture, hears the voices of peoples long silenced, and works with others for justice, freedom, and peace...⁵

We lament social platforms and virtual spaces that create alienation and foster bad behavior, allowing harmful and hurtful comments without relationship or responsibility.

Because we lament the disappearance of civility and decorum and the acceptability of mockery and disdain...

*We hope for your promised renewal of human life in society, revealed in Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and return, which even now casts judgment on the inhumanity that marks human relations and the awful consequences of our complicity in injustice.*⁶

Because we hope to become emissaries of peace who seek the good in cooperation with authorities in our broader society, while fighting against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare...⁷

We lament the rejection of intellect, denial of science and the failure to heed the counsel of knowledgeable experts.

Because we lament the worsening impacts of climate change and global warming, especially on the most vulnerable and least culpable nations, communities and people...

*We hope that your Spirit will inspire us and all people to use our abilities, possessions and technology as gifts entrusted to us for the advancement of the common welfare, that evil might be banished from your creation and all might be able to live well.*⁸

Because we hope in you—a God who, in a special way, is the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged, a God who brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry, who frees the prisoner, supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, and helps orphans and widows...⁹

We lament the narrowing of compassion and the widening of health inequalities, the deepening of poverty, the decline of social service programs, and the widening of the wealth gap.

⁵ A Brief Statement of Faith, lines 65-71

⁶ Confession of 1967, 9.32

⁷ Confession of 1967, 9.25

⁸ Confession of 1967, 9.46 and 9.53

⁹ Confession of Belhar, 10.7

Because we lament the pernicious and pervasive culture of violence that normalizes the slaughter of innocents and seeks to fortify and “harden” the world around us...

*We hope in you—a God of tenacious solidarity and steadfast love, who, like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.*¹⁰

Because we hope in you—a God of sovereign love, who created the world good and makes everyone equally in your own image...¹¹

We lament the harassment, discrimination and harm done to the LGBTQIA community, both in church and society, in history and still today.

Because we lament our failures to welcome the stranger, give aid to the traveler and appreciate the migrant...

*We hope to become a people who stand by those in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that we must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*¹²

Because we hope for a church who believes that credibility of your message of love and reconciliation is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred, and enmity...¹³

We lament the racism, racial injustice and white supremacy that is well-rooted and continues to infect the systems, structures, and citizens of our country.

O God, as disciples of Jesus Christ,
we share an identity and calling to be witnesses,
to give voice to the laments we carry and the hopes we hold onto,
to lift them up, in tension and unity,
in a time of both brokenness and promise.
Hear what we have confessed today,
in both sorrow and earnest longing,
and enable us to become the people you desire us to be,
even as we keep watch for your coming kin-dom. Amen.

¹⁰ Brief Statement of Faith, 47-51

¹¹ Brief Statement of Faith, 29-30

¹² Confession of Belhar, 10.7

¹³ Confession of Belhar, 10.5