A National Day of Mourning and Lament

A call to grieve and honor those who have died from COVID-19 and join together in a National Day of Mourning and Lament for the healing of our nation

Our nation has passed a grievous point in history: 100,000 Americans have died from COVID-19. As people of faith, we cannot allow this grim number to go unnoticed. Always and everywhere, it is the duty of religious communities to remember the dead and mourn their passing. From generation to generation, we have been given this task: to speak their names and honor their lives. The deaths of 100,000 Americans shall not pass by unmarked and unlamented.

It is hard to comprehend this magnitude of deaths in so short a time. The past three months have been some of the deadliest in U.S. history. Americans have endured more death than in many of our wars, as we just memorialized last weekend. At 100,000 deaths, COVID-19 becomes the fifth most deadly event in U.S. history. The number of deceased is equivalent to whole towns and cities. The pandemic now ranks among those moments in the life of our nation marked by national remembrances, somber memorials, and moving tributes. As people of faith, we cannot let this moment pass unnoticed. The nation must be given the chance to mourn, lament, and remember the dead.

The rapid spread of the disease, the scope of its impact, and the mitigation through “social distancing” has prevented the time and space for us to grieve. It has been impossible to bury our dead as people have for thousands of years—communally and intimately with friends, family, and neighbors. As religious leaders, we are deeply connected with our nation’s pain. Both as individuals and collectively as a nation, we need time to stop, reflect, pray, mourn, and honor the dead.

To meet this need, religious communities across faiths will act with unprecedented unity, gathering together safely to mourn, memorialize, and remember their lives both in our diverse faith traditions and in our public squares. Together, we will pray for the healing of our nation.

On May 29, 30, and 31 — Friday, Saturday, and Sunday — America’s religious communities will gather for the first time following this grim 100,000 marker — many of us still virtually. Keeping with their own traditions and practices, each will mourn our American dead and pray for the healing of our nation.

On Friday, with Ramadan finished, Muslims will remember the revelation of the Quran. On Friday and Saturday, Jews will remember God’s covenant as they celebrate Shavuot and read their yizkhor (remembrance) prayers. On Sunday, Christians will celebrate Pentecost Sunday, when the first Christians were given courage through the reception of the Holy Spirit. We will name, honor, lament, and offer our tributes to the lives and families of those who have died. The Christian prayers of mourning for the 100,000 dead will be offered across our Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American traditions and communities.

But religious communities do not act alone. We call too on political leaders — the president, senators and members of Congress, governors, and mayors—to lead a National Day of Mourning and Lament on Monday, June 1 — at noon local time — to pause to remember those who have died. It will be appropriate for flags to be lowered and to observe moments of silence, mourning, memorial, prayer, reflection, and bell ringing. We will stop. We will remember. We will mourn and honor our dead. We will pray for the healing of the nation.
In the days prior to our national weekend of remembrance, we invite Americans to use social media and other communication platforms to post prayers and laments, names, photos, and tributes to those who have died of the coronavirus in the United States, using the hashtags #Lament100k and #DayofMourning. In many civic spaces, outside places of worship and our homes, groups or individuals may place empty chairs with the names, dates, and photos as tribute to and in remembrance of those who are no longer with us.

We will ask God to help heal our land in a moment of mourning as we honor those who have died, often without their loved ones around them. We come together both to weep and to rejoice for those lives that have been lost. We shall mourn the loss of so many Americans, many known only to families and friends, coworkers and neighbors. We will mourn family members and friends whom we loved; worked and worshiped with; ate, played, and prayed with; important members of our communities, some who were on the front lines of caring for and serving others; and those who passed on the street with a smile and nod. By God’s grace, we will mourn with families who have not been able to memorialize, mourn, or properly bury their dead.

Our lament will also honor hard truths we have learned during this pandemic: Our suffering has been unequal, elders have been vulnerable and alone, black and brown neighbors have borne disproportionately the brunt of sickness and death and the front lines labor of the fight against this disease. Native communities, our land’s original caretakers, have been particularly hard hit — as they have been so many times in the past. Asian Americans have been targeted by hateful words and actions. Our prayers for the healing of the nation must acknowledge the brokenness of our democracy and rededicate ourselves to repair the injustices this pandemic has revealed, even as work for the healing of those who are afflicted with the virus.

This vocation of the faith community to stop, name, feel, remember, memorialize, and pray for the dead, their families and their friends unites all our traditions and transcends our politics.

This momentous and tragic 100,000 marker will not be an empty data point on death's grim graph. We will remember those whom we loved and pray for both healing and hope — for our nation and the world. As a people, we have borne this pandemic's cost in the lives of our loved ones. As a nation, we shall honor and mourn them together.

As faith leaders, we must help to lead our congregations, communities, and country in this time of grief and lament in a way that will lead us forward more united as a country to address the very real challenges we face ahead. And that we must do together.

Rev. Eddy Alemán, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America
Dr Claude Alexander, Pastor, The Park Church
Scott Arbeiter, President, World Relief
Rev Cornelius Atkinson, Pastor/State Chairman, Church of God Ministries – Anderson, IN
Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Archbishop, Legate and Executive Director of Ecumenical Office of the Armenian Orthodox Church, Armenian Orthodox Church
Dr. Nicole Baker Fulgham, President, The Expectations Project
Bishop Carroll Baltimore, Bishop, Global Alliance Interfaith Networks
Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, Co-chair, Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival
Sr. Bridget Bearss, Executive Director, Stuart Center
Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World
Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister, United Church of Christ
Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie, President, Boddie and Soul Ministries
Carol Bremer-Bennett, Executive Director, US, World Renew
Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, Dean, Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary
Dr. Walter Brueggemann, Professor, Columbia Theological Seminary
John Carr, Director, Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, Georgetown University
Rev. Dr. Iva Carruthers, General Secretary, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference
Rev. Eugene Cho, President-Elect, Bread for the World
Shane Claiborne, co-founder, Red Letter Christians
Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey, Director of Partnership Relations, Alliance of Baptists
The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church
Kaitlin Curtice, Author and Speaker
Marie Dennis, Senior Advisor, Pax Christi International
Sister Karen Donahue, RSM, Justice Team Member, Sisters of Mercy
Reverend Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Rev. Dr. Bob Ekblad, Pastor and Co-founder, Tierra Nueva
Rev. Dr. Claude Forehand, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Kannapolis
Rev. Dr. Robert M. Franklin, President Emeritus, Morehouse College
Rev. Donnie Garris, Moderator, United Missionary Baptist Association
Rev. Joel Gibson, Executive Director, The Micah Interfaith Clergy Table of New York City
The Rt. Rev. J. Christian Giesler, Bishop, The Moravian Church
Rev. Dr. Aaron Graham, Lead Pastor, The District Church
Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Secretary Emeritus, Reformed Church in America
Susan Gunn, Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Dr. Mimi Haddad, President, CBE International
Reverend Jeffrey Haggray, Executive Director, American Baptist Home Mission Society
Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale, Senior Pastor, Ray of Hope Christian Church (DOC)
Rev. Adam Hamilton, Pastor, United Methodist Church of the Resurrection
Rev. Dr. Richard Hamm, Retired General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Lisa Sharon Harper, President and Founder, Freedom Road, LLC
Rev. Fred Harrell, Founder and Sr. Pastor, City Church San Francisco
Rev. Jimmie R. Hawkins, Director of the PCUSA Office of Public Witness, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Rev. Joey Haynes, University Chaplain, Queens University of Charlotte
Rev. Dr. Peter Heltzel, Associate Professor of Theology, New York Theological Seminary
Rev. Dr. Suzanne Watts Henderson, Dean of Belk Chapel and Professor of Religion, Queens University
Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, General Minister & President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Rev. Dr. Joel Hunter, Chairman, Community Resource Network
Hyejin Im, President and CEO, Faith and Community Empowerment
Rev. Dr. Cassandra Aline Jones, Professor, Rockbridge Theological Seminary
Kathy Khang, Board vice-chair, Evangelicals for Social Action
Rev. Dr. Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals
Sr. Janet Korn, Sister, Sisters of Mercy.
Dr Mark Labberton, President, Fuller Theological Seminary
Kim Lamberty, Director, Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation, Stuart Center
Dr. Paul Leeland, Bishop, The United Methodist Church Charlotte Area
Rev. Jo Anne Lyon, Ambassador and General Superintendent Emerita, The Wesleyan Church
Rev. Carlos L Malave, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together
Rev. Michael Mata, Pastor, Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene
Dr. Walter McCray, President, National Black Evangelical Association
Sister Patricia McDermott, RSM, President, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Institute Leadership Team
Brian McLaren, Pastor and Author, Vote Common Good
Noah Merrill, Yearly Meeting Secretary, New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers)
Rev. Dr. Betsy Miller, President, Moravian Church Northern Province
Rev. Dr. Otis Moss Jr., Pastor Emeritus, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church
Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, Senior Pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ
David Neff, Director of Music, Church of the Nativity & Holy Comforter, Baltimore
Dr. Mary Nelson, Interim President & CEO, Christian Community Development Association
Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst, President, Community of Interdisciplinary Theological Studies (CETI)
Rev Doug Pagitt, Executive Director, Vote Common Good
Rev. Adam Phillips, Co-founder, Faith 2020
Rev. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah, Professor, North Park Theological Seminary
Elaina Ramsey, Executive Director, Red Letter Christians
Diane Randall, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation
Bishop Lawrence Reddick, Senior Bishop, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Rev. Dr. Katharine Rhodes Henderson, President, Auburn Seminary
Rev. Dr. Raymond Rivera, Bishop Designate, Latino Pastoral Action Center & Sanctuary Church
The Rev. Dr. C.K. Robertson, Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Ministry Beyond the Church, The Episcopal Church
Dr. J. Elvin Sadler, General Secretary-Auditor, The A.M.E. Zion Church
Rev. Dr. Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition
Rev. Dr. Alexia Salvatierra, Assistant Professor of Integral Mission and Transformational Development, Fuller Theological Seminary
Rev. Dr. Rob Schenck, President, The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute
Dr. Stephen Schneck, Executive Director, Franciscan Action Network
Micky ScottBey Jones, Director of Healing and Resilience Initiatives, Faith Matters Network
Ronald J. Sider, President emeritus, Evangelicals for Social Action
Rev. Gail Song Bantum, Lead Pastor, Quest Church
Rev. Ron Stief, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture
Rev. Richard Tafel, Pastor, Church of the Holy City, Swedenborgian Church
Rev. Adam Taylor, Executive Director, Sojourners
Bishop Efraim Tendero, Secretary General, World Evangelical Alliance
Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, Associate General Minister, United Church of Christ
Nikki Toyama-Szeto, Executive Director, Evangelicals for Social Action
Rev. Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners
Pastor Colin Watson, Sr., Executive Director (acting), Christian Reformed Church in North America
Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network
Rev. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Director, School for Conversion
Mr. James Winkler, President, National Council of Churches
Sister Carol Zinn, Executive Director, Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Mr. Johnny Zokovitch, Executive Director, Pax Christi USA