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A Liturgy for Moving Forward

During the silence between readings, the worship leader lights the candle.

Worship leader: We have each been affected by this pandemic in different ways. Let us now take an opportunity to name and grieve the emotional, physical and spiritual toll this past year has taken, not for the purpose of moving backward or dwelling on the pain, but instead for the purpose of being honest and authentic with ourselves and one another. I pray that in acknowledging and grieving our losses, we might create room in our hearts for hope, creativity, joy and ingenuity. As we light these six candles, may we recognize our companionship in our sadness, find comfort in our solidarity and feel empowered to live into this next chapter with faith and hope.

Candle 1 — Physical Losses A Reading from Psalm 69

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God.

Worship leader: We are worn out calling for help after experiencing vast physical losses. Nearly 600,000 Americans and over three million people worldwide have died of COVID-19. Numerous others have survived but are dealing with the lingering side effects. We also recognize the exhaustion of our essential workers, who have spent extra hours and sleepless nights caring and protecting us. We also recognize those living with disabilities, older adults and those in socially- and financially-disadvantaged communities for whom life has been more difficult and access has been less available. In this time of silence, I invite us to name, aloud or silently, the physical losses we have experienced.

Candle 2 — Emotional Losses A Reading from Psalm 6

Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long?

Worship leader: How long, O Lord? How long can those with mental health challenges and substance use disorders remain disconnected from the sources of support and recovery? How long can we live under the stress of uncertainty, anxiety and fear? How long, O Lord? In this time of silence, I invite us to name, aloud or silently, the losses we have experienced related to our emotional well-being and sense of balance.

Candle 3 — Spiritual Losses A Reading from Psalm 13

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?*

Worship leader: For some of us, God has felt absent. Away from our community of faith, our Christian sharing groups, our hymn singing and our holiday rituals, we feel adrift and long for spiritual centeredness. Other sources of spiritual nourishment, too, are deeply missed as we feel disconnected from cultural and social enrichment that stirred in us a sense of wonder and awe. In this time of silence, I invite us to name, aloud or silently, the losses we have experienced related to our spiritual centeredness, our connections with our faith community and our relationships with God.

Candle 4 — Financial Losses A Reading from Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

Worship leader: We ask for mercy as we see the ongoing impact of this pandemic on small businesses. We ask for mercy for those who have been let go from their jobs and those whose hours have been cut. We ask for mercy for those who have not been able to find work and for those dedicated parents who are exhausted from trying to maintain their professional obligations while parenting. We ask for mercy for all those dealing with housing and food insecurity. Hear our voices, O God. In this time of silence, I invite us to name, aloud or silently, the losses we have experienced related to our financial stability, our professional identity or our professional aspirations.

Candle 5 — Interpersonal Losses A Reading from Psalm 25

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish.

Worship leader: Family gatherings, graduations, weddings, funerals, visits with friends — we have missed it all. We grieve the disruption to sporting events, family visits, annual trips or vacations, and even the too long, but wonderful, youth recitals. And for those who experience domestic, physical or emotional abuse or hostility, these months of quarantine have been suffocating and dangerous. In this time of silence, I invite us to name, aloud or silently, the interpersonal and relational losses we have experienced.

Candle 6 — Hidden Blessings A Reading from Psalm 30

Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.

*You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead;
you spared me from going down to the pit.*

*Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the
morning. You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my
sackcloth and clothed me with joy.*

Worship leader: We trust that rejoicing does come in the morning, and that our God of power and might can turn wailing into dancing, clothing us with joy. As we light our final candle, I invite us to consider those hidden blessings — those new discoveries and practices we hope to bring with us post-pandemic, the ways we have grown and those things we have learned. In this time of silence, I invite us to name, aloud or silently, the ways in which we have grown or the new awareness and appreciation we have discovered.

Closing Prayer God of grace, you know the suffering we have experienced is real. Losses that we have suffered amplify past losses and compound into feelings, which at times are almost too much to bear. We are weary; so help us, dearest Lord, to grieve, to grow, to let go, to heal and recover.

Help us to remember these losses and the hidden blessings so that we might begin anew with a deeper sense of awe, appreciation, wisdom and perspective.

In Jesus' name
we pray, Amen.

