

# Why Faithful Innovation?

## The Current Landscape

Even before the pandemic, congregations around the United States were facing a number of challenges. These included challenges like struggling to form Christian community with members, children, and neighbors; a disconnect between church practice and people's daily lives; not knowing whether the congregation would exist for the next generation; or even thriving with lots of good things, but uncertainty about if they are "God things." A polarized political cycle damaged caring relationships through mistrust and a pandemic kept many of our congregations from meeting together for worship, weddings, and funerals.

All of these disruptive shifts impact congregational life. Many traditional ministry practices are breaking down, and traditional pastoral training does not translate well to the current leadership challenges. These realities require both opportunities for healing and innovation in the local church.

## Connecting Faith to Everyday Life

While these shifts are new to many of our leaders, these types of challenges are not new to the church. God's law points out where things are breaking down and where we need healing. God's gospel promises that healing and new life will be a part of our future as God's people.

The people in our congregations and our communities are experiencing challenges

in their lives and looking for ways to deal with these challenges.

When participation in the local church does not speak directly to those things that are "keeping them up at night," people look elsewhere for help and resources.

The church must pursue faithful innovation as it seeks to connect God's presence and reality to the everyday lived experience of the people in congregations and communities.

## Facing Adaptive Challenges

One thing that all of these challenges have in common is that they are adaptive in nature, rather than technical. Instead of simply requiring a new ministry or program, new learning is required in order to adapt congregational life to connect more deeply with God, each other, and our neighbors. This is fundamentally theological and spiritual work.



## Listening to Longings and Losses

This spiritual practice of lament invites participants to enter into a process of lamenting the longings and losses that accompany any type of change that occurs as we faithfully innovate. Fears of loss can prevent congregations from pursuing faithful innovation altogether. Lamenting can create space for grieving losses as well as building trust in God's direction for the future.

*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so  
disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for  
I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*  
Psalm 42:5 NIV

# Listening to Longings and Losses

## A Spiritual Practice of Lament

Many clergy and congregations long for their ministry to look differently than it currently does. Some want things to look like they “used to.” Others want to see changes in how the congregation is led, who participates, or what the congregation focuses on.

Many clergy and congregations fear they are going to lose something important to them (or have lost something important) as the congregation faces the future. These fears are a reality for congregations who have questions about whether or not they will exist for another generation. These fears are also a reality in congregations that are stable or thriving and want to keep things going the way they are into the future.

This spiritual practice invites participants to enter into a process of lamenting these longings and losses. Lamenting can create space for grieving losses and building trust in God’s direction for the future. This is framed according to the basic structure of a lament psalm. We invite you to work through it for yourself but also to consider using it with groups within your congregation.

## Begin with These Questions

What’s one wish you have for your congregation?

What’s something that used to happen (or used to be true) in the congregation that you wish would return?

What's one thing you fear might be lost as your congregation moves into the future?

What's something that has changed that you feel is a loss in the life of the congregation?

## Lamenting Longings and Losses

### **Address God**

Direct your lament to God, framing the conversation about your longings and losses as a prayer.

### **Complaint**

Name what you long for and wish was true about your congregation. Name your fears about what has been or could be lost as you move into the future.

### **Confession**

Confess your need for God's grace and forgiveness in your life.

### **Ask God for Help**

Name what you want God to do for you. Express your longings and losses as a request.

### **Affirm Trust in God**

Affirm your trust in God and God's leadership over the future of your congregation.

### **Promise to Praise God**

Praise God for who God is, what God has done, and what God will do.

# For More Information

## Faith+Lead Website

Want to learn more? Have questions?

Visit the Faith+Lead website for additional resources and information about Learning Communities offered through Luther Seminary.

[faithlead.luthersem.edu](http://faithlead.luthersem.edu)

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