

A Liturgy for the Closing of a Parish or Congregation and The Secularizing of a Consecrated Building

The Gathering of the People -- *See Further Suggestions at the end of this paper.*

A hymn may be sung. See hymn suggestions at the end of this paper.

Opening Prayers¹

The people remain standing.

Presider My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are gathered here in this place that has rooted and grounded us in God's love. A place in which we, and those who have gone before us, have celebrated the mysteries of our faith, shared one another's joys and sorrows, and encountered our Lord in word, sacrament and one another.

As we celebrate the Eucharist here for the last time, let us come before God's presence with thanksgiving for the grace bestowed upon us and upon our forebears, saying, blessed be God forever.

Presider For the baptisms celebrated here,

Response Blessed be God for ever.

Presider For those times in which we were forgiven, comforted and consoled here,

Response Blessed be God for ever.

Presider For the power of God's word proclaimed here in scripture and in preaching,

Response Blessed be God for ever.

Presider For the prayers said here for healing, and the sick who have come here for comfort,

Response Blessed be God for ever.

Presider For those times in which we gathered here for the sacred banquet; for the Easters, Sundays, and holy days on which we worshipped faithfully; for the confirmations, ordinations, feasts of saints and martyrs celebrated here; for the marriages witnessed here, and the funerals held here in hope,

Response Blessed be God for ever.

¹ Adapted from Thomas G. Simons, *Holy People, Holy Place: Rites for the Church's House* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998), p. 100-101.

Presider O God in whom we find our refuge and our home: though your greatness surpasses that of any temple made by human hands, you graciously provided from your abundance this place in which we and our forbears met your divine presence. Protect us as we now take leave of it, and lead us to a new assembly where, with all your saints, we may praise and adore your Holy Name. This we ask in the name of your Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

Presider The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.

Response And also with you.

The service continues with the Gloria or other hymn of praise. Whatever is chosen should help the congregation shift its mood from sorrow and regret to joy and hope.

Presider Let us pray.

The Collect

Almighty God, watchful and caring, our source and our end: We, with the saints of generations past, have come to praise your name and give you thanks for the gifts of grace received here in the Church of **N**. Be present, wherever we may be, to guide and to care for us, to illumine and to bless us. This we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Readings

One or two readings follow in the usual way. A psalm, canticle or anthem may be said or sung between the readings. See suggested readings and psalms at the end of this paper.

A hymn, psalm or alleluia verse may be said or sung before the Gospel.

The Gospel

The Gospel is announced in the usual way. See suggested Gospel readings are found at the end of this paper.

The Homily

The Creed

The Nicene or Apostles' Creed follows.

The Prayers of the People

A suggested form of prayer may be found at the end of this paper.

Confession and Absolution

The Peace is exchanged.

The Celebration of the Eucharist

A hymn maybe sung.

Prayer Over the Gifts

O Lord our God, whose Son Jesus Christ is our lasting home: Grant that as we know him in the holy food of this Eucharistic feast, so may we know him who dwells continually in our hearts. We ask this in his Name. Amen.

In place of the Prayer Over the Gifts, the following may be said:²

Presider: Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of Life.

Response: Blessed be God for ever.

Presider: Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation, Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.

Response: Blessed be God for ever.

The liturgy continues as usual with sursum corda.

The Preface of the Incarnation (BAS 220) or of Ordination (BAS 226) may be used.

Prayer after Communion

Presider O God, whose Son promised to be with us until the end of the ages: Grant that we, who have been received by him here in this foretaste of the heavenly banquet, will feast with him always in our eternal home. Who lives and reigns now and for ever. *Amen.*

All Glory to God...

In place of the Prayer after Communion above, the prayer on p. 214 of the BAS may be said.

Or the following post-communion prayer may be said:

² International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Order of Mass*, 1970-1985.

Presider Almighty God,

All we thank you for feeding us with the holy food of the Body and Blood of your Son, and for uniting us through him in the fellowship of your Holy Spirit. We thank you for the grace that we and our ancestors have known in this church dedicated to _____ (*or, our patron St. _____*), and ask that we may serve you in the days ahead, ever rejoicing in your glory, and coming at length into your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Secularizing a Consecrated Building ³

Presider We who are gathered here know that this building, which has been consecrated and set apart for the ministry of God's holy Word and Sacraments, will no longer be used in this way, but will be taken down. (used for other purposes).

To many of us this building has been hallowed by cherished memories, and we know that some of us will suffer a sense of loss. We pray that they will be comforted by the knowledge that the presence of God is not tied to any place or building.

It is intention of the diocese that the congregation which worshipped here will not be deprived of the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

I will now read the Deed of Deconsecration.

(*Or, Let the [bishop's] Declaration of Secularization now be read.*)

A warden, the Archdeacon, or other person appointed, reads the bishop's Declaration, which is in the approved form.

Presider The Lord be with you.

Response And also with you.

Presider Let us pray.

Lord God, in your goodness you once accepted to your honour and glory this building, now secularized. Receive our praise and thanksgiving for the blessings, help and comfort which you bestowed upon your people in this place. Continue, we pray, your many mercies in your Church, that we may be conscious at all times of your unchanging love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our prayers, and dispose the way of your servants towards the attainment of everlasting salvation; that

³ General Convention of The Episcopal Church, 2003, *The Book of Occasional Services, 2003*, (New York: Church Publishing), p. 319-321.

among the swift and varied changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Blessing

*The people may be blessed with the following:*⁴

May you be ever grateful to God the Father for his creation of us and of all our world in its immeasurable richness. *Amen.*

May you be ever grateful to God the Son for his Incarnation, his Teachings, his Crucifixion and Resurrection, and his (daily) presence with us at the altar. *Amen.*

May you be ever grateful to God the Holy Spirit for his on-going presence with us in his Church, for his inspiration and guidance, and for unexpected moments of grace and beauty in our lives. *Amen.*

And the blessing of God Almighty, (+) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. *Amen.*

*Or the following may be said:*⁵

The Lord bless us and keep us. *Amen.*

The Lord make his face to shine upon us, and be gracious to us. *Amen.*

The Lord lift up his countenance upon us, and give us peace. *Amen.*

The Dismissal

Deacon or Presider: Go forth in the name of Christ.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Or

Deacon or Presider: Go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

A hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung.

For more ideas, see Further Suggestions at the end of this paper.

⁴ The Order of Julian of Norwich, *The Seasonal Blessings*, (Waukesha, Wisconsin), p. 22.

⁵ *The Book of Occasional Services*, p. 321.

Further Suggestions

We would do well to keep in mind this quote from Thomas Simons in *Holy People, Holy Place, Rites for the Church's House*, while planning liturgies of church closure: "The tone and character of the entire rite should be one of thanksgiving for this place that has served to gather God's people together in sacramental encounter with God."

If circumstances permit, the presider and people may gather outside the church prior to the start of the liturgy. Here, the opening prayers that begin, "My brothers and sisters in Christ" may be said. The presider and people may then process into the church, singing a hymn or psalm, preceded by the paschal candle. Alternatively they may be preceded by a large wooden or other cross, and candles. If this option is chosen, the liturgy continues inside with the greeting.

During, or just prior to, the final hymn, parish members may come forward and receive small items to carry out of the church in procession (altar vessels, bible, book of gospels, hangings, an icon, etc.). These items should be carefully chosen in advance. It may be meaningful to have the oldest and the youngest members of the congregation each carry an item. If the congregation whose church is being closed is joining those of a neighbouring church, these items may be those which will travel to, be placed in, and used in the new church. If this option is chosen, The presider may present the delegated persons with the objects they will carry, saying:

As the life of this community will continue in another place, receive this (name of item) for use at (name of new church). Take it as a sign that our journey of faith will continue there.⁶

At the conclusion of the liturgy, the people may process out of the church preceded by the paschal candle. The congregation may wish to gather in a nearby hall and offer their memories of parish life. A small exhibit of historical artifacts and memorabilia might be assembled for people to see, eliciting memories and conversation. Food's always good.

⁶ Simons, p. 100.

Suggested Readings

Genesis 28.10-15
Psalm 84
1 Peter 2.1-5, 9-10
John 20.19-21

Exodus 40. 16-17, 34-38
Psalm 91.1-6, 9-10
Hebrews 3.1-6
Luke 24.13-35

Isaiah 44.1-5
Psalm 87
1 Peter 2.4-10
John 17.6-19

Isaiah 35.1-10
Psalm 122
Ephesians 4.1-6
John 17.6a, 15-23

Ezekiel 47.1-9, 10b-12
Psalm 16.5-8
Acts 2.42-47
John 15.(1-11) 12-17

1 Chronicles 29.14-20
Psalm 84.1-7
1 Peter 2.1-5 (6-8)
John 2.13-22

1 Chronicles 29.14-20
Psalm 84.1-7
Revelation 21.9-10, 22-27
Luke 24.13-27

Hymn Suggestions *(All found in Common Praise, 1998)*

How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place 498
Now Thank We All Our God 399
Alleluia No. 1 405
Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones 320
O God, Our Help In Ages Past 528

For All The Saints 276

Holy God, We Praise Thy Name 334
When the King Shall Come Again 109
Of Eternal Love Begotten 132

Womb of Life, and Source of Being 390
He Came Down 368
I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath 346
New Songs of Celebration Render 316
Lift High the Cross 602
O Holy City, Seen of John 596
Blest Be The Tie That Binds 507
O Christ, the Great Foundation 524
You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord 531

My Life Flows On in Endless Song 401
What Wondrous Love Is This? 400
Precious Lord, Take My Hand 509
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say 508

The Day of Resurrection 205
Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain 215
Christ Is Risen, Christ Is Risen 220
Come Away to the Skies 225
We Walk by Faith, and Not by Sight 244
At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing 207

Ubi Caritas et Amor 553
Jesus, Remember Me 634
A hymn in honour of the parish's patron saint

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The Prayers of the People

In peace let us pray to the Lord saying, Hear our Prayer.

Almighty God, who gathers us here at *(name of church)* today as you gathered our ancestors in the faith: Fill our hearts as you filled theirs; hear our confessions, forgive our sins, lift our sorrows and made us glad. We praise and thank you for the fellowship and mutual care given and received here, for the ministry and mission undertaken, and for all that you have been and will be in our life together. Lord, in your love, **Hear our Prayer.**

Almighty God, at whose altar we are welcomed today as our Mothers and Fathers were welcomed: Give us a foretaste of your heavenly banquet; unite us with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and with one another through the sharing of his body and blood; strengthen us for mission and for our daily lives; and send us out, as you sent those before us, to share Christ's love with all the world. We praise and thank you for the grace and favour you have shown us in the Holy Sacrament of the altar, and for the hope of sharing this feast with all the saints at an eternal table. Lord, in your love, **Hear our Prayer.**

Almighty God, whose Word we hear proclaimed today as our forebears did in former days: Live among us through the Gospel and the stories of all your faithful people in history. Through the preaching of your Word teach us, call us, and guide us on our way. And here we praise and thank you most especially for the Word made Flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord, who has been and will be, a lamp unto our path. Lord, in your love, **Hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, to whose glory this church was built with hands of love, with sweat and with toil: As this house provided us with a sacred place to honour and worship

you, we give our thanks to all those whose sacrifices and gifts manifested for us the beauty of holiness for many years. We thank you, O Lord, for giving vision to those who went before us: readers, servers, musicians, and many others whose contributions to our worship of you gave us a glimpse of heaven. Today, O Lord, we return this place to you. We give it with the same spirit of love that led the builders of this place. And we pray, O God, that you will honour and bless those who come after us, in the way you have blessed us in the past.

Lord, in your love, **Hear our Prayer.**

The presider may conclude with the following collect:

O Lord, the life of the faithful, the glory of the saints, and the delight of those who trust in you: Hear our supplications and thanksgivings, and quench, we pray, the thirst of those who long for your promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

