

Facing Your Church's Uncertain Future

Helpful Practices for Courageous Conversations & Faithful Decisions

WORSHIP RESOURCES



United Church of Christ
Church Building
& Loan Fund

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WORSHIP RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION TO LITURGIES

This is a set of liturgies to accompany the process towards making decisions concerning a church's future including legacy and closure. Noting the difficulty and importance of this decision, these liturgies serve to frame and guide congregations in two stages in the process.

The hymns and hymn numbers in all these liturgies reference *The New Century Hymnal*.

Congregations can modify aspects of each service to accommodate their particular needs.

STAGE 1 – DISCERNMENT

Deciding upon the future of a congregation is a momentous decision. Though congregations might have used the resources in the *Living Legacy Handbook*, the discussion leading to a decision should be guided by the Holy Spirit. Rather than cast this process as a congregational meeting, consider invoking the Holy Spirit with liturgy to remain faithful to our discipleship.

Unlike most congregational discussions, there should be a "chaplain" designated to discern the movement of the Spirit. During the Discussion portion, the chaplain should listen carefully. This

person has the authority to stop the discussion at any time in order to invoke the Spirit through prayer, either aloud or silent. The chaplain may also work with the pastor identify a reading or hymn to clarify a point that was made or to summarize the progress of the discussion. The chaplain also will record major points and ideas to reflect back to the participants in the Reflection portion. The chaplain should be another clergy person who is not a member of the congregation.

There are three different liturgies to accompany discernment. Each draw upon a different reading: Psalm 90, Luke 13:6-9, and Matthew 6:19-21.

Note: The Psalter reading for Psalm 90 is on Page 680 in the *New Century Hymnal*.

STAGE 2 – CLOSING

There are two different liturgies to accompany closing. The first, *Living Bones*, covers congregations leaving their buildings and remaining together as a congregation. The second, *Ending and a New Beginning*, covers congregations ending their ministry and dissolving as a church.



LIVING BONES

Use this liturgy when a congregation leaves its facility and chooses to remain together to continue its ministries in a new location. It is based upon Ezekiel 37:1-12.

"The hand of God came upon me, and God brought me out by the Holy Spirit and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. God led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. God said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O God, you know." Then God said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the One. Thus says God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am God.

*So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then God said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as God commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude."
- Ezekiel 37:1-12, NSRV (Adapted)*

The service is divided into two parts. Part One is the dry bones 37:1-6. This addresses the end of the congregation's life in their current structure. Part Two is the Spirit bringing the bones back to life, the balance of the pericope.

The service also offers two liturgical options. Following a short opening, congregations using Option A either move from place to place in the facility, or take a visual tour using images of different rooms in the church. In each place the congregation offers its remembrances of each location followed by prayer. Option B is the congregation remains in the sanctuary without seeing images of the different rooms, but the congregation will share its remembrances of each place in the facility.

Note: This liturgy can also be used for congregations who are closing as well.

ENDING AND A NEW BEGINNING

Use this liturgy when a congregation chose to close its ministry and disband as a congregation. This liturgy's design presumes that the congregation will pass on artifacts and assets to other congregations, community agencies, and instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ. As such, this liturgy uses Revelations 21:1-6 to help people look forward.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

*'See, the home of God is among mortals.
God will dwell with them;
they will be God's peoples,
and God will be with them;*

*God will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'*

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also God said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then God said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."

- Revelations 21:1-6, NRSV, Adapted

During this service, the congregation will have an opportunity to share remembrances and reflections upon its ministries in the Sharing Memories portion. Sharing them can be simple to elaborate. A simple remembrance would be people sharing their memories verbally. A more elaborate one would be a slide show of the congregation's ministries. The most elaborate would be a timeline from the first year of the congregation's history to the present and beyond.

Though this service can stand alone, the author suggests thinking of this service as the conclusion of three events. The first event is a final social gathering, such as a church supper. If the congregation chooses to use a timeline¹, this would be an appropriate time to make it together. It offers an opportunity to reminisce and to put many of the details, such as a pastor's tenure and membership, that would take too long during the service. It may also help to clarify fuzzy dates and events for the service. The second event is a separate service to acknowledge the end of the current pastor's service to the congregation. It would be a service primarily for the congregation with participation from the local association. The liturgy to end a pastor's ministry would come from the *United Church of Christ Book of Worship*. Some modification might be necessary to accommodate the pastor if the pastor will celebrate communion at the final service. This might be done a week before the final service or even the

morning of the final service.

The accompanying liturgy is the final service of the three events. The congregation should invite all the living clergy who served the congregation. The congregation should also invite recipients of the congregation's artifacts and assets. The congregation should have at least a representative from the association or the conference or both in attendance.

During this service, a representative from the wider church, either the Conference or the Association, will bless the clergy who have served the congregation and will commission the current membership to continue their ministries in other settings. Recipients of artifacts and assets will describe to the congregation how they will be used. The congregation will respond urging them to be stewards of their legacy. Communion concludes this service. Either the current pastor can celebrate, or if that pastor chooses to receive communion with the congregation, another clergy can celebrate.

A WORD ON CLOSING A CHURCH

Some congregations designate various artifacts, including the church building, as sacred. Terms have included consecrated, commissioned, and dedicated. These artifacts served to facilitate the congregation's ministry. When a church closes its building, some artifacts may go to another congregation while others may remain behind.

As these artifacts also hold deep meaning and memory for many people, both closing liturgies include an acknowledgement of these artifacts in the communion invitation's introduction. Congregations not wishing to acknowledge these artifacts, including the building, can choose not to use the communion introduction.

¹Using a timeline. Create a simple timeline on a large roll of kraft paper. Delineate periods in the congregation's history in decade increments. For congregations with a long history, the initial years could be delineated in 50-year increments with later years by decades. Mark major events and ministries on the timeline, especially those events older than any member of the congregation. Include the names of pastors and their years of ministry on the timeline. Include ordinations. Let the current congregation mark recent events on the timeline. Invite parishioners to mark their names and the year they joined the congregation on the timeline. This may have to be done in the social hall. The final line should mark the day of this service. Leave adequate space to show the future ministries where during this service visual representations of the congregation's disbursements can be put on the timeline. As this timeline becomes a sacred object as a result of this service, it should be preserved and made accessible for historians and the public. The congregation can give it to the local library or to the Congregational Library for its archives.

OTHER NOTES AND RESOURCES

Though the above liturgies link closely with the respective reading, users are free to draw upon other texts if they are more appropriate. The following are other suggested texts:

Hebrew Scripture

- Genesis 12:1-9*
- Deuteronomy 34:1-8*
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*
- Jeremiah 31:1-6, 31-34

Epistles

- 1 Corinthians 3:6-9
- Ephesians 6:18-20*
- Philippians 4:1-9
- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-25*
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Gospel

- Matthew 9:35-38
- John 15:1-11
- John 16:25-28, 32-33
- John 21:15-18*

**Indicates suggested readings for a service to acknowledge the end of a pastor's service to the congregation.*

As with scripture, users are not bound to the hymns in the liturgies. These are other suggested hymns from the *New Century Hymnal*:

"Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise" (1)

"The God of Abraham Praise" (24)

"God of the Sparrow God of the Whale" (32)

"Una Espiga (Sheaves of Summer)" (338)

"Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ" (347)

"What Gift Can We Bring?" (370)

"We Would Be Building" (607)

"O Day of God, Draw Near" (611)

"Carmina, Pueblo di Dios (Go Forth, O People of God)" (614)

ABOUT THE WORSHIP WRITER

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WORSHIP RESOURCE

LEADING TO A CONGREGATIONAL DECISION

BASED UPON PSALM 90

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: Sisters and brothers, members and friends in faith. We gather as the body of Christ to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit.
- Many: **As the body of Christ we are mindful that we incarnate Jesus in our work and ministry.**
- One: Bring your sorrows and laments for the past.
- Many: **And we will share our dreams and visions for the future.**
- One: God is abides with us in this time and place. Come and let us open ourselves to the urgings of the Spirit.

HYMN

No. 25. "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

RESPONSIVE PRAYER FOR DISCERNMENT

(Divide the congregation in two, such as A are men and B are women or A is left and B is right)

- One: Timeless and eternal God, you have been our dwelling place for generations. These walls have witnessed life's ebbs and flows:
- A: **babies baptized**
- B: **children confirmed**
- A: **couples married**
- B: **lives celebrated**
- One: Though we might imagine this place as timeless as you, we face a hard reality that this place is not you. As we discern our future as the body of Christ.
- A: **Open our ears to hear a new song.**
- B: **Open our eyes to see new possibilities.**
- A: **Open our hearts to new expressions of love.**
- One: May our discernment remain faithful to the lessons Jesus taught.
- All: **Grant that by your presence among us at this time, we will listen before speaking and to speak in love. May our decision prosper our ministries to make real your presence in our community. Amen.**

DISCUSSION

REFLECTION

(From the chaplain's notes)

PSALTER

Page 680, Psalm 90

UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Everlasting and faithful One, we are thankful for your presence and your Holy Spirit which guided our discussion. We trust that our discussions and our decision pleased you. We pray that our decision will make Jesus real beyond the walls of this church. As our ministry takes on a new shape and direction, we pray that it will continue the story Jesus began long ago. Amen.

BENEDICTION

WORSHIP RESOURCE

LEADING TO A CONGREGATIONAL DECISION

BASED UPON LUKE 13:6-9

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Put on your gardening shoes. Get your gloves. We have work to do.

Many: **Our garden was our pride and joy.**

One: Today, we must nourish and water our garden.

Many: **We will reclaim our garden with love and tender care.**

SCRIPTURE

Luke 13:6-9

UNISON PRAYER FOR DISCERNMENT

Our garden seems tired, O God. We are, however, not prepared to let it go. We must tend it, giving it water and compost. We must weed it so the nutrients will nourish our crops and invigorate their growth. Help us tend our garden. Give us time to discern what we can do. Grant that your Holy Spirit will guide us in our discussions and our decisions. Let us not lose sight of Jesus' call for our ministries to bear fruit again. Amen.

HYMN

No. 586 "Come to Tend God's Garden"

DISCUSSION

REFLECTION

(From the chaplain's notes)

HYMN

No. 270 "Like the Murmur of the Dove's Song"

UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Farmer God, thank you for the gift of time to reclaim our garden. Thank you for being with us and giving us the strength to undertake this labor. You gave us a vision. We have looked ahead to see what is possible with the resources we have. We leave this meeting with hope for our future and the promise that our garden will bear fruit to feed our community once again. Amen.

BENEDICTION

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WORSHIP RESOURCE

LEADING TO A CONGREGATIONAL DECISION

BASED UPON MATTHEW 6:19-21

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We are stewards of the Word and stewards of this church's ministry.
Many: **All that we have is God's. The Holy One entrusted everything to us.**
One: Today, God calls us to be responsible stewards.
Many: **Today, we will lay claim to that which we treasure in our hearts.**

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:19-21

UNISON PRAYER FOR DISCERNMENT

Faithful God, these walls have witnessed the momentous events in people's lives. For that we hold all that is here sacred. Yet, we groan under its weight as we hold onto all of this. We have to face some difficult questions. Jesus taught us to that our treasure is in heaven. Come Holy Spirit, turn us to see our treasure in heaven and to set aside our treasure on earth. Amen.

HYMN: No. 313 "Like a Tree Beside the Water"

DISCUSSION

REFLECTION

(From the chaplain's notes)

HYMN: No. 306 "The Church of Christ in Every Age"

UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Patient God, thank you for guiding us through our discussions. You helped us separate our heavenly and earthly treasures from each other. We have clarity and can see the path set before us. Lead us and we will follow the path you set before us. Amen.

BENEDICTION

WORSHIP RESOURCE

LIVING BONES: LEAVING A CHURCH BUILDING

BASED UPON EZEKIAL 37: 1-12

AN ENDING

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: Friends, come into this sacred place to give thanks to the Almighty who has accompanied us on our journey.
- Many: **We stand at the threshold. We look back and we look ahead.**
- One: We gather to say farewell to this place as we look forward to a new beginning.
- Many: **We say farewell with gratitude as we leave with hopeful anticipation.**
- One: Come friends. Let us worship and praise God together.

HYMN

No. 70, "God Is Here as We Your People"

UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Faithful and eternal God, you have tended and cared for us in this place across generations. The time has come for us to leave. Under your watchfulness we have collected memories of family, friends, and strangers who have been a part of our lives as this body of Christ. You have helped us through life-changing events. Here we have learned to be faithful disciples of Jesus. In this time together, let our memories strengthen us as a congregation to walk together towards a new future. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Ezekial 37: 1-6

OPTION A

Note: The order of this section will be a function of the order in which the congregation goes through its final tour. The sanctuary portion, however, should be last. Additional prayers for spaces not included in this option can be added.

KITCHEN PRAYER

O God, here we prepared food to share with family, neighbors, and friends. Here we made friends as we prepared roasts and casseroles, baked cookies and pies, and brewed countless pots of coffee. Here we made food for joyful fellowship suppers and sad funeral receptions. From here we made sure all were fed. Let us take time to share our memories. We have learned to be faithful disciples of Jesus. In this time together, let our memories strengthen us as a congregation to walk together towards a new future. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE

(After sharing memories) **We will carry these memories imprinted upon our hearts. Amen.**

CHURCH SCHOOL PRAYER

O God, here we learned our first lessons about Jesus. Here we taught our children discipleship. Here we discovered the upside down world of the gospel. Moved by your Spirit and through our learning, we have grown in our faith. Over time, we have come to trust Jesus' teachings. They have given us a firm foundation upon which to build our lives and further our ministries. Let us take time to share our memories.

PRAYER RESPONSE

(After sharing memories) **We will carry these memories imprinted upon our hearts. Amen.**

SOCIAL HALL PRAYER

O God, when we listen carefully we can hear the faint echoes of church functions long gone by. We remember with fond joy suppers and gatherings which brought us closer together. We came here as strangers and left as friends. While we remember weeping sad tears in our common losses, we also remember weeping joyful tears as we shared laughter together. We remember celebrations and annual meetings. Here, we built and strengthened our community. Let us take time to share our memories.

PRAYER RESPONSE

(After sharing memories) **We will carry these memories imprinted upon our hearts. Amen.**

SANCTUARY PRAYER

O God, this sanctuary has been this church's heart. Here we have heard the word proclaimed beginning with the Rev. _____ (name of the first pastor to preach in this sanctuary). We have heard words which have inspired us and words which have comforted us. We have heard music which gave us joy and music which made us weep. We have made promises at baptisms and witnessed covenant promises made in marriage. Here we have grieved the deaths of family members, friends, and neighbors. Here we were made into the body of Christ. Let us take time to share our memories.

PRAYER RESPONSE

(After sharing memories) **We will carry these memories imprinted upon our hearts. Amen.**

HYMN

No. 522, "I Love to Tell the Story"

OPTION B

REMEMBRANCE LITANY

One: Timeless God of memory, this church has been a place of comfort and inspiration, a place of community and witness, and a place where hope was born and peace was found. It has served generations of families, friends, and neighbors. O God, we remember

Many: **And give thanks.**

One: This sanctuary has been the heart of this church. The word was first proclaimed beginning with the Rev. _____ (fill in the pastor's name) and has since inspired, challenged, and comforted people who have worshiped here. O God, we remember

Many: **And give thanks.**

One: We have celebrated baptisms and weddings. We have grieved at funerals and memorials. We have sung hymns and read the Word. O God, we remember

Many: **And give thanks.**

One" Here in this church we have served countless meals and in so doing have forged friendships as well as supported each other in sorrow. We have been fed and nourished to be your instruments of grace. O God, we remember

Many: **And give thanks.**

One: Here in this church our children learned life's lessons. We taught them about You, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. They learned stories that they will tell to their children and their children's children. O God, we remember

Many: **And give thanks**

One: Here we have welcomed the stranger who became a friend. Here we healed broken spirits and given hope to the hopeless. Here we have learned to be Christ to our community. O God we remember

Many: **And give thanks.**

One: Listen, O God, to our stories

SHARING STORIES

(Congregation will share stories. After all the stories are finished, say Amen.)

HYMN

No. 522, "I Love to Tell the Story"

(Note: At this point, the service finishes in the sanctuary and is the same for both Option A and Option B)

THE FUTURE

SCRIPTURE

Ezekial 37: 7-23

PRAYER

Steadfast and gracious God, we cannot thank you enough for your guidance which brought us to this time and place. This is not the end, but the beginning of a new life for us, the body of Christ. You have heard the stories we shared. Seal them in our hearts as we prepare to leave this place. We will take them with us into our future. Let your Spirit renew us. Let them open our ministries to new possibilities and opportunities. Amen.

HYMN

No. 410, "If You But Trust in God to Guide You"

SHARING OUR HOPES AND DREAMS

(Congregation will share hopes and dreams of its future)

LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN

No. 332, "As We Gather at Your Table"

COMMUNION

INVITATION

As we have spoken our prayers, sung our hymns, and shared our memories, God has been with us. Indeed, God has been in this place since we began worshipping in this church. The pulpit, the font, the table, (add other artifacts, such as musical instruments, as appropriate) as well as this sanctuary, have been dedicated to helping all of us proclaim the gospel through our ministries. All of them have special meaning for us. As we leave this place we will hold these in our hearts.

Leaving this place, this bread and this cup will nourish us. It will sustain us in our journey to our new home.

(Words of invitation provided by the celebrant)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: We confess, O God, that though we decided that our future will be better after we leave this place

Many: **We still harbor some doubts.**

One: We have difficulty letting go of our past

Many: **We want to hold on a little longer.**

One: Though we have great hopes for our new future,

Many: **We cannot be certain.**

All: **Forgive us. Help us to trust that you will leave with us and stay with us as we travel into our future. Amen.**

SILENT PRAYER AND REFLECTION

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

COMMUNION PRAYER

One: God be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: **We lift them to God.**

One: Let us give thanks to God most high..

Many: **It is good to give God thanks and praise**

One: Indeed it is right in all times and places to give God thanks and praise. We give thanks to God for Creation and for entrusting us as its stewards. We remember God never left our forebears, beginning with Abraham, as they

wandered from place to place. Indeed by their wandering, Israel became a great nation.

We remember Jesus and his ministry and how he traveled among the people he served. We remember that he healed people where they were. We remember that he spoke truth to power in the public square and for that he stirred fear among the authorities. For that, they executed him on a Roman cross.

Yet, he slipped the shackles of death and emerged from the tomb three days later. He taught and served the people until his ascension forty days later to be with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. By his death and resurrection we are reminded that life always overcomes death. We proclaim this along with the saints who spoke these words before us in this place

Many: **Holy, holy, holy. God of love and majesty. The whole universe sings of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God. Glory to God in the Highest.**

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

O God, we have come a long way. We have come to this point in our life together as a congregation in this place. We are only the latest of many generations who have celebrated this sacred meal around this table.

**As we conclude our time at this table we know You will not abandon us.
You will guide us on the path of love and light
You will instill in us the power and courage to proclaim your peace and
justice through our ministries of healing and grace wherever we will be.**

This, my friends, is our final meal at this table in this church. Let us remember this meal as we remember the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples long ago. Just as we recalled our ministry here, they recalled their ministry with Jesus. At one point Jesus took bread and after giving thanks and blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them saying, "Take, eat. This is my body broken for you. As often as you eat it, remember me." Later, after supper, he took a cup and after giving thanks and blessing it, he gave it to them saying, "Drink this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you drink of it, remember me."

By this bread and this cup, we boldly proclaim:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

CONSECRATION

SHARING THE FEAST

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

One: You have fed us at this table in this church, O God, for decades too numerous to count. We have been part of a long line of saints who have gathered in this church, and who now will depart never to return.

Many: **Thank you for this meal. Thank you for the stories we have shared. Thank you for your presence throughout our time in this place. We leave strengthened for our ministries to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as we leave our past behind to enter our future. Amen.**

HYMN

No. 76, "Sent Forth by God's Blessing"

DEPARTING PRAYER

O God, you have watched over this church since _____ (year built). You have been a faithful presence in the life of this body of Christ. You have witnessed our celebrations and our sorrows. You have been a calming presence to us in our times of turmoil. We have shared our final stories. We have broken bread and shared the cup for the final time. As we leave this church, we will carry our memories with us. We leave this place with your Holy Spirit to live and flourish in our ministries of grace as we, the body of Christ, step into our future. Amen.

BENEDICTION

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WORSHIP RESOURCE

ENDING AND A NEW BEGINNING: CLOSING A CONGREGATION

BASED UPON REVELATION 21: 1-6A

AN ENDING

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." This is a day of ending and a new beginning.

Many: **We have labored together for many generations. Our time has come to set our burdens down.**

One: Come, all who have hope and believe in resurrection.

Many: **Though we gather one last time as the body of Christ, we come to celebrate our ministry born anew.**

One: We have come this far by faith. Let us give God our thanks and praise.

HYMN

No. 308, "At the Font We Start Our Journey"

RESPONSIVE PRAYER OF INVOCATION

One: Eternal and steadfast God, we have come this day to close our ministry as this body of Christ.

Many: **We give thanks to you for your abiding presence throughout our discernment.**

One: Though filled with sadness, we are also filled with hope

Many: **knowing that the ministries begun here will continue.**

One: They will flourish in ways and places,

Many: **though we might not yet know or understand at this time.**

One: We gather having faith that the Church is eternal.

Many: **We draw comfort knowing that we were a chapter in its proclamation of Christ's gospel.**

One: Come among us in this time of worship. Wipe away our tears and fill our hearts with joy. Amen.

GLORIA

SCRIPTURE

Revelation 21: 1-6a

A NEW BEGINNING

PRAYER FOR THE END OF A MINISTRY

Note: The pastor for this congregation should lead this prayer.

Eternal God, you have been our abiding presence. You called us to be the body of Christ to serve our community and the world. We have shared our joys and sorrows. We have celebrated baptisms, confirmations, and marriages. We have watched our children grow. We have grieved the death of loved ones. We have forged friendships. We have proclaimed the gospel's light through our ministries. We remember especially (*name various ministries and missions in the immediate and wider community*) _____ and are grateful in the ways these ministries have nurtured and shaped our faith. We give thanks for the power of your Holy Spirit that sustained us from the day we were founded in _____. Write these memories and ministries on our hearts so we can carry them for the rest of our days. Amen.

HYMN

No. 603, "Giver of Life Where'er They Be"

BLESSING THE CLERGY

Note: Invite the clergy who have served the congregation and who are present at this service to stand. Introduce them by name to the congregation along with the years of their tenure. This should be led by a representative from the association or conference.

O God, beginning with the Rev. _____ (name of the first pastor), your Holy Spirit called pastors to serve this congregation. Each brought a unique set of gifts to further the ministry of this church. (addressing the clergy) You have been this congregation's spiritual guide. We are grateful for your service of preaching and teaching. We honor your steadfast leadership and your wise counsel. We give thanks for raising disciples and sending them forth into the world. We pray that God's blessing will remain with you as you continue to serve Jesus the Christ. Amen.

LITANY FOR OUR MINISTRY AS NEW MISSIONS

Note: Representatives from churches, denominational entities, and agencies receiving financial or physical assets from the church should briefly describe how the asset they receive will be used where indicated. If using a timeline, a graphic representation of the asset could be affixed to the timeline in the space after its final line as each representative comes forward. The pattern for this litany will be the same for each recipient of the asset. The recipient should come forward when the celebrant calls out the name.

Church Moderator: The church is eternal. Though ministries may die, ministries are also born. A local church has its own life. Its ministries are its stories. Like mortal life, a local church's life comes to an end. Our resurrection faith, however, reminds us that all life is eternal. Though _____ (name of local church) will no longer create new stories, its stories will live through other ministries. Today the stories of _____ (name of local church) will pass to others, whose ministries will continue the legacy begun here.

After the first recipient, begin here

Church Moderator: The ministry of this congregation will continue through _____ (name asset), which we gave to _____ (name recipient)

Recipient: *Representative acknowledges the gift and describes how it will continue the congregation's ministries.*

All: **We are grateful that you will be a steward of _____ (name asset). We take comfort knowing that our legacy will continue through you.**

COMMISSIONING THE MEMBERSHIP

(Led by association or conference representative)

Leader: The _____ (name of congregation) has borne witness to the gospel in this community since _____ (year of establishment). This church has been a faithful partner in covenant with the _____ (name of association).

Today, while we honor your ministries, we also grieve its end here in this place. We give thanks for your service and partnership in ministry.

People: **With sadness we acknowledge the end of our ministry as this body of Christ. We give thanks for the Holy Spirit's guidance and presence in our ministries. We are grateful that we have been able to be a covenantal partner in ministry with the _____ (name of association) and accept your thanks for our service.**

Leader: As believers in eternal life in Christ, this ending is also a beginning of a new life of ministry. Your service to God in Christ goes on. On behalf of this association, I urge you not to falter in your ministry. You have spiritual gifts to use to bring about God's realm of peace and justice on earth. Use them wherever the Spirit will lead you.

People: **We leave this place knowing that the river of life goes on. We give thanks for the spiritual gifts which we have nurtured here. We now take them into new settings of ministry to further Christ's love in this community.**

LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN

No. 562, "Take My Gifts"

COMMUNION

INVITATION

We are bound as the body of Christ by the bread and the cup. Generations have come and gone and all of them have been served at this table set for all of us. As we have spoken our prayers, sung our hymns, and shared our memories, God has been with us. All that we see now have been dedicated to helping us be this body of Christ to proclaim the gospel through our ministries. We hold all of these along with our memories of this place in our hearts as we go forth to continue our ministries as the Spirit leads us. This bread and this cup will nourish us and sustain as we journey to our new homes.

(Words of invitation provided by the celebrant)

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess that despite our faith in resurrection's promise, we come to this table with sadness.

We look back with some regret that we are here.

We dwell in memories of what was and what has been.

We forget the enduring and implicit promise of this table that in Christ there is no end.

Forgive us.

Set our faces toward the future.

Open our eyes to see new ministries.

Open our hands to release what was.

Assure us that our ministry will continue beyond this generation and the next.

Go forth with us as we travel into our future. Amen.

SILENT PRAYER AND REFLECTION

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

COMMUNION PRAYER

One: God be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many: **We lift them to God.**

One: Let us give thanks to God most high.

Many: **It is good to give God thanks and praise.**

One: Indeed it is right in all times and places to give God thanks and praise. Our faith reminds us that endings are also beginnings. We remember the Flood after which God made a covenant with us to preserve life. We remember Judah's exile and that upon its return became a light to all nations.

We remember the greatest lesson of endings and beginnings in Jesus, who proclaimed the kingdom of God was at hand. He healed people. He questioned authority. He taught that love casts out fear and that life always has the final word. The authorities condemned him for that and put him on a cross to die.

Yet, he slipped the shackles of death and emerged from the tomb three days later. He taught and served the people until his ascension forty days later to be with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. By his death and resurrection we know that life always overcomes death. We proclaim this along with the saints who spoke these words before us in this place.

Many: **Holy, holy, holy. God of love and majesty. The whole universe sings of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God. Glory to God in the Highest.**

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Just as Jesus gathered one last time with his disciples, we gather at this table.

Though it is the last time for us in this time and place, we know that this ending is a beginning.

As we conclude our time at this table in this place we know You will not abandon us.

Your Holy Spirit will continue to give life to the ministries we birthed.

You will guide us on the path of love and light to serve You in new places and in new ways.

Friends, we are resurrection people. This is our final meal together. Let us hold the memory of this meal in our hearts just as we remember the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples long ago. As we recalled our ministry here, they recalled their ministry with Jesus. At one point Jesus took bread and after giving thanks and blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them saying, "Take, eat. This is my body broken for you. As often as you eat it, remember me." Later, after supper, he took a cup and after giving thanks and blessing it, he gave it to them saying, "Drink this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you drink of it, remember me."

Though the disciples did not know when they gathered at this table what was to come, we do. We know that our ministry will not end because our ministries proclaim resurrection's promise that life always triumphs over death. Thus, by this bread and this cup, we boldly proclaim:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

CONSECRATION

SHARING THE FEAST

UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Loving and eternal God, we give thanks for your presence in this church and your guidance in our ministries of healing grace. Thank you for the stories we have shared. Thank you for this meal. You have blessed us in ways more than we can imagine. We depart confident that our ministries will live on. We leave strengthened to continue to carry Christ's message of love into our community and the world so all might know your peace and your justice. Amen.

HYMN

No. 39, "In the Midst of New Dimensions"

BENEDICTION