

Liturgical Resources for Marking the end of a Local Congregation's Journey

Note

There are many emotions when a congregation decides that it has reached the end of its journey and Synod Moderators, or their designees, will wish to work with the congregation to explore these emotions at the final service.

When done well, these services, like a good funeral, can be celebratory as well as healing. There can be anger in a local church where some wish to close but others don't.

There will inevitably be sadness, but also maybe a sense of relief when those who have been carrying more than their fair share of work are able to stop. There may also be guilt – and a sense of failure – from both minister and members. They may ask why they have not been able to pass on the faith, or why

this congregation has closed on their watch. Like a funeral service, the final service of a congregation needs to tell its story, acknowledge the stages of grief, and allow the story of the church's life to be told.

There are, of course, practical arrangements which have already been taken care of – where will hymnbooks, fittings and furnishings go? The Synod can assist with this and with ensuring that records are suitably archived. It is helpful if all this has been done, or at least arranged, before the final service so that the service marks conclusion, grieving and consolation alongside completion, gratitude and celebration.

A range of resources are offered here, to use or adapt as might be useful. We offer two sets of readings and commentaries upon them to help build a sermon and a

Communion Prayer, as some congregations have found that the gathered church celebrating this sacrament together one last time is very powerful indeed.

Calls to Worship

As a mother has compassion for her child
so our God is tender-hearted towards us.

All **Our Creator knows how we are made
and remembers that we are breath and dust.**

The days of our lives are like summer grasses,
All **like the wildflowers that flourish today and will be
gone tomorrow,
their seeds dispersed to the wind.**

But the steadfast love of God is from everlasting to
everlasting,
All **and for generation after generation.**

(Based on Psalm 103:13-17)

or

In the music and stories and silence we share:
All **speak to us, Christ Jesus**

In the laughter and tears and memories we share:
All **comfort us, Christ Jesus**

In the friendship and hospitality we share:
All **be with us, Christ Jesus**

As we give thanks for what has been,
as we pray for what is yet to come,
as we celebrate all we have given,
as we grieve all we have lost:

All **risen Jesus, meet us here.**
Amen.

or

You give us time, O Most High, for every matter under
heaven

All **a time to be born and a time to die.**

Risen Jesus we know that, with you,
all journeys start with excitement, a sense of adventure,
and some trepidation,

All **but all journeys reach their conclusion in you.**

Be with us, Gentle Spirit,
as we gather today to mark the end of this congregation's
journey,

All **to celebrate and to mourn.**

We come, Eternal Trinity, to give thanks and to grieve,
to laugh and to cry, to remember and to let go,
to acknowledge that you give us all

All **a time to be born and a time to die.**

or

God, whose love brought creation into being
and is in every unfolding moment – You are with us
God, who is seen in the life of Jesus
and found in the living Word in the Bible – You are with us
God, who lives within us through the Holy Spirit
and is with us every step of the way – You are with us
Let us worship God.

Prayers of Approach, Confession, and Grace

Source of life,
Creator of the changing seasons,
of beginnings and endings and all that is in between,
great is your faithfulness to us.

We gather here today for the last time
in this building where generations have worshipped
before us.

We come with many and varied emotions,
conscious of the weightiness of this occasion,
and the loss and trepidation that change can bring.

Holy Spirit, helper and comforter,
breathe on us your peace beyond words.

Jesus, God-with-us, let us feel your presence beside us.

Mothering God, God of Abraham, Moses and Ruth,
the stories of our faith reveal you as a nomadic God.

Never contained by walls or by expectations,
You move among and journey with your people.

Here, in silence, and in the safety of your steadfast love,
we bring you our fears and our failures.

(silence is held)

For all that we have neglected or left undone,
for mistakes we have made,
for opportunities we have missed,
forgive us.

Restore our peace. Refresh our faith. Renew our hope.

All **Amen.**

Assurance of grace

Hear the Good News and rejoice!
God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding
in love.

Wherever we may go, grace will find us.
Even if we were to fly up to the heavens.
Even if we were to go down, deep into the bowels of the earth.
Even if we were to take the wings of the morning,
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there.
Even there. We would not be beyond the reach of God's
healing and forgiveness.

(Based on words from Psalms 103 and 139)

or

Eternal God, we meet with you in this chapel,
as generations have met before us.
We come with hearts full of past memories,
of present concerns and of future hopes.
God of the present time, of ages past, and of all the ages
that are to be,
we worship you and praise you that your presence is not
just now,
but through all time; not just here, but everywhere.

Loving God, we come carrying a burden of sorrow mixed
with thanksgiving.
you walked our way in Jesus Christ, your love made flesh,
and you know what it is to care, to laugh, to weep.
Help us, as we worship, to open our hearts to you and to
know your love for us.
Guiding God, whose will is revealed to your children through
the Holy Spirit
we place the ... Y ... years of the life of this fellowship in
your hands.

Come to us as comforter and stay with us as strength
from above.

Living God, hear us as we confess to you the ways in
which we have hurt others,
the ways in which we have failed you,
the ways in which we have failed in our calling to be
your people.

In your mercy, forgive us, fill us with your peace, we pray,
and restore us as your children.

Jesus says to all and to each 'your sins are forgiven,
be made whole'.

He also says 'follow me'. And so we follow in the example
of our saviour Jesus

as we pray the words we gave his followers to pray.

Our Father...

or

Holy One, we come today with a range of emotions,
we celebrate and yet we mourn,
we laugh and yet we cry,
we give thanks and yet we feel guilty,
we are relieved to lay down the burden
but yet wish we'd had more strength.

Enfold us in your love, Lord Jesus, as we weep and
laugh with you.

Remind us of our journey's start as we reach the end of
this journey.

Bless us in the complexity of letting go, that our future
steps are secure.

Forgive us when we've been tempted to despair,
when the recriminations have been more appealing
than acceptance,
when we've become angry with the choices of others,
when we've blamed ourselves for social forces we
can't control,
and when we've forgotten it is your will not ours that matters.

Move us on, O Wise Spirit, that as we let this grain of
wheat die,
rich fruits are released from these resources.
May the witness of this congregation over the last ... Y ... years,
resonate in harvests elsewhere
that, in your good time, we may rejoice in your Kingdom
where all are healed and made new again.

All **Amen.**

Prayer for Illumination

Though the trees don't blossom,
though the fields seem bereft of harvest,
though the herd seems to have strayed,
we will still praise you, O God, our life and our salvation
as you speak to us through stillness and silence,
through Word and song, [through bread and wine]
and through each other as we hear your Word
proclaimed and expounded.
Give us the grace to hear, understand, and follow.

All **Amen.**

Suggested Readings

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, Habakkuk 3:17-19, St John 12:20-26

or

Leviticus 25:1-4, St John 15:1-11, Acts 1:1-11

Sermon Notes

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is a book which ponders the irony of life: the injustice with which we live, the meaningless of human toil, the limitations of wisdom and even of righteousness. Yet, at one and the same time, the author is, like Habakkuk, convinced of God's existence and loving kindness. The author is determined to believe in God's sovereign will which has predetermined human history, and even the cycles of nature. The author believes that the limitations of humanity mean we can never truly know God's purposes but must trust them. While we may struggle with the ideas of predestination inherent in our tradition, there are some rich veins here for a sermon marking the end of a congregation's journey. These contradictions between God's sovereignty, our ignorance, and the unpredictability of life even under God's foreknowledge led the author to identify the goodness of life and enjoyment of it as a gift of God.

In the suggested passage, seven pairs of times in human life are mentioned; in Jewish thought, seven is a number suggesting completeness. Birth and death are mentioned first – the most dramatic events in our lives, birth and death are echoed in the agricultural practice of planting and

uprooting. Warfare is balanced with healing and building, human emotions are balanced with weeping and laughing finding their way into the list of pairs. The writer has a time to enjoy life and a time to mourn, to look for and relinquish things that matter. Rending garments as a sign of mourning is well known within the Jewish tradition, and this is balanced by the need to sew and repair. There's a time to speak and be silent; at services like this, both are needed to allow the processing of such deep emotions. Finally, the writer sees the emotions of hate and love giving way to war and peace.

The skilled preacher will identify the range of emotions present, citing them in God's good purpose. This congregation has been born, has planted a rich harvest, and now it has its natural ending. It has slain giants in its history (some of the notable achievements of the past could be mentioned – social action, serving the community, nurturing vocations) and has been a healing presence for many. It has broken down resistance to God's gracious calling, and built up the local community in tangible ways – the preacher may wish to give examples. It has mourned as people have died, and has supported the bereaved as they've let go of their loved ones into God's gentle keeping, turning mourning into dancing. It has celebrated with those who have married here and has supported those whose marriages have, sadly, ended. It has been a place where God's truth was sought and has encouraged those who have lost their sense of faith. It has been a place where silent companionship has been balanced with prophetic words. It has been a place where hatred has given way to love.

When those who are left wonder what they have gained for their toil, they need to think of the couples who have met and

married here, the children baptised at the font, the elders ordained, those who left for war but never returned, and those who rebuilt the country after wars. They need to think of the lives touched and changed by God through the ministry of Word and Sacrament and give thanks for all that has been good here; for all who have found rest and healing.

Habakkuk

Habakkuk is an unusual book in that it's an extended conversation between the prophet and God. The conversation is about how to live faithfully in unjust situations that seem to undermine the idea that God is fair and righteous. It is a book for hard times. It may have been written as the power of Egypt was eclipsed by the new superpower of the age, Babylon. The writer has seen dreadful things and implores God to intervene; God's responses confirm action in history but in ways that surprise the prophet – God, for example, was raising up Babylon against Israel. Not a welcome message for Habakkuk's audience! In response to a profound revelation by God, Habakkuk penned the suggested passage in a remarkable affirmation of faith. All the disasters mentioned would spell famine for an agricultural people, yet Habakkuk declares he will still praise God.

Maybe the congregation feel that disaster has befallen them; the flock has wandered off, new growth has not been seen, the fields are barren, instead of being ripe for harvest. Yet still we praise God. It maybe that, as the writer of Ecclesiastes held, we cannot discern God's sovereign purpose. It may be that a smaller Church will be more effective at proclaiming the Gospel – after all a

persecuted, poorly educated, group of social misfits changed the world, overthrew slavery, raised the status of women, rescued foundlings and proclaimed the Gospel through word and deed in the earliest Church. Whatever God is up to is hard for us to comprehend but, like Habakkuk, we need to balance our natural fears, pain, mourning, and disappointment with a determination to praise God anyway!

St John

With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Jesus was speaking here about his death and resurrection. The Greeks who heard him might have been a bit puzzled by the agricultural reference to a seed falling to the ground, seeming to die, but germinating bringing forth a new plant. Death brings new life. Jesus, in the passage which follows, acknowledges his trepidation 'my soul is troubled' and ponders if he should ask the Father to save him from this. Yet, of course, he accepts God's will.

Here again the skilled preacher can address the range of emotions that the congregation may have but find a way forward in this idea of death bringing life; we see it with seeds, with Jesus and with churches. Of all people, Christians should be the most sanguine about death; acknowledging the pain of loss but seeing the potential for renewal and life. The resources unleashed by the end of this congregation will bring new life to others. The members dispersing (hopefully) to other congregations will enrich those churches. The stories and history of this place will be a blessing to others as, in God, nothing is lost.

Leviticus 25:1-4 – Jubilee

Instructions to Israel for living as God's distinctive people. Written into the law was the idea that the 50th year was a holy year, a time of celebration and rest. Old Testament scholar Meg Warner describes this jubilee as a 'return to factory settings'. Debts were wiped out... slaves and prisoners set free... land and property surrendered. The underlying message is that land and people ultimately belong to no-one but God. Verse 23 reads, 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.' The jubilee idea may resonate with the closure of a church. We have been tenants in this building. Now we hand it back to our Synod, with the hope and prayer that this resource will be used for God's purposes in new ways. We have worked together in this place. Now we are released from our work. We lay down our responsibilities. Our letting go frees up resources and energy. It gives us the gift of fallow time... time to rest and heal, to be replenished. It releases us to do new things. Our identity as God's people is not shaken.

John 15:1-11 – vine and branches

Part of Jesus' 'farewell discourse', the words he spoke to his disciples to prepare them for his death, and their life together beyond it. The grapevine is a rich metaphor and could be expanded to discuss the natural cycles and seasons of nature. In growing and tending grapevines, pruning is vital. The best, sweetest fruit are the ones that grow close to the vine. Branches that are dead, unproductive, or rambling need to be cut away, otherwise they divert and deplete valuable energy and nutrients. This isn't a threat. It's a life-giving promise.

It's permission to let go of the things we are struggling to sustain. It affirms that God desires our flourishing. It comes with an assurance that we are loved (15:9).

Acts 1:1-11 – Ascension

The Ascension story is a story about an ending, loss, and transition into a new phase, a new way of being a community of Jesus-followers. And it comes with promises and assurances that may be helpful when a church is closing. Here, the disciples are losing Jesus for a second time. For all the glory of the Ascension event, it must have left them feeling bereft and confused... wondering what God's plan might be, and where to go from here. The risen Jesus has spent 40 days with his disciples preparing them for this moment of parting: sharing meals... speaking to them about the kingdom of God... reminding them of the scriptures and the resources of their faith. The disciples keep looking back, nostalgically, to when Israel was a sovereign nation, and asking... when are we going to get back to that, Lord? When will God restore all that we have lost? Jesus teaches them that they're going to have to adjust their perspective, and loosen their grasp on some of the ideas and patterns they've always depended on. Their expectations have been too narrow. He encourages them to keep an open mind, saying 'it is not for you to know the times...' He encourages them to think bigger and broader, '...to the ends of the earth'. And Jesus promises that help will come. They're not going to be alone. They will receive power from the Holy Spirit. From now on they will carry Jesus' presence within them, just as Jesus carries them with him into the heart of God.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, Eternal Majesty,
All **creator of all things seen and unseen,**
who inspired the foundation of this congregation, nurtured it
All **and who now calls us to commit it to loving memory.**

We believe in Jesus, enfleshed Word,
All **who was born, lived, died, and rose to new life
to set us free.**

Jesus called hundreds of people to be part of this
congregation,
nurtured them at his table, inspired them to work for the
coming kingdom,
danced with them in joy,
All **and consoled them in bad times.**

We believe in the Holy Spirit, Fire of Love,
All **who inspires us and always drives us on,**
who leads us now in our sadness and celebration,
calling us to respond to the Gospel's call
All **in new ways, new congregations and new contexts.**
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As we give thanks for all that this place has meant to us,
we also bring to God our prayers of concern for the world.
Let us pray.

Ever-present God, we give thanks for the *doors and windows* –
through which we see the world and go out to serve the
world's needs.

We pray for countries in turmoil...
we pray for all who struggle with
(...here insert contemporary issues with which we struggle),
and for those who live in the deepest poverty.
Lord in your mercy...

All **hear our prayer**

We give thanks for the *pews* – where people have
gathered together.
We pray for communities in deep need – praying for
governments tackling the climate emergency, for the
United Nations,
for those who serve the common good in our hospitals
and care homes.
Lord in your mercy...

All **hear our prayer**

We give thanks for the *pulpit*, from which we have heard
your truth.
We pray for all those who seek justice in the world...
for migrants seeking safety, for law courts and prisons,
for those seeking reconciliation where there is violence.
Lord in your mercy...

All **hear our prayer**

We give thanks for the *roof and walls*
and we pray for those without a permanent home –
with no home at all, living in temporary accommodation,
or struggling to pay rent or find a mortgage.
Lord in your mercy...

All **hear our prayer**

We give thanks for the *font*, in which babies and children
have been baptised.

We pray for young people known to us, for schools and
colleges,
for those taking exams or any whose future feels uncertain.
Lord in your mercy...

All **hear our prayer**

We give thanks for the *people*
who have been part of the life of this chapel,
especially those who are now safe in the glory of heaven.
We pray for those who grieve,
for any who are sick or troubled,
and we give thanks for all the love and care
known here through the years.
Lord in your mercy...

All **hear our prayer**

We give thanks that you are always ready to listen when
we pray
and that your blessing is for all your children, in Jesus' name.

All **Amen.**

or

We pray to God our loving Father,
through Christ the cornerstone and in the power of the
Holy Spirit,
We thank you, God, that you know our needs,
that you have come to be with us in Jesus Christ,
and that your love and care never fail

Lord hear us

All **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for the living stones which make up the body of Christ in God's world

We give thanks for the faithful years of service given by so many in this church – for the joys, the pains, the love and the heartache.

We pray for what is to come in this building – that your wisdom may guide us.

And we pray for the continuing witness of ... X ... here and the wider church in ... Y ...

Lord hear us

All **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for the stones which are rejected; for those people who feel they do not fit into society, those whose voices are not heard and who feel without hope, people who are refugees, homeless, or out of work. We pray for those in our communities who are lonely – that we may reach out to them with your love.

Lord hear us

All **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for the stones which make us stumble; for those who live in fear of violence – in ... Z ... for those who face domestic violence, and those living with addiction, illness, disability or infirmity

Lord hear us

All **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for each one here today – for those we love,
for those who love us

Lord hear us

All **Lord graciously hear us.**

We hold onto God's promise, this day and each day which
is to come:

'Once you were not a people, but now you are my people,
once you have not received mercy, but now you have
received mercy'

And so may the mercy, peace and love of God surround us
and all those for whom we have prayed

Now and forever,

All **Amen.**

Communion Prayer

Eternal One,

long ago you called a people as your own,

freed them from slavery and led them dry-shod through the sea.

You taught them to be free and, through the prophets,

how to use that freedom wisely.

You sustained them in the bitterness of exile,

and restored their hope in your own good time.

In Jesus, you became one of us,

teaching and loving, listening and healing,

turning back the wind and overturning religion's tables.

For this the powers turned on him,

subjecting him to illegal trial, torture, and a rebel's execution,

showing your weakness on a cross of shame and defeat.

But you did not leave him in the grave,
but called him forth to new life, a life available to us all.

Before he was given over to death,
he shared in the simplicity of a meal with his friends,
during that meal he took bread, said the blessing,
broke the bread and said:

Take this all of you and eat it. This is my body which is
broken for you.

Do this in memory of me.

After the supper he took the cup filled with wine,
gave it to his friends and said:

‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’

For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup,
we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

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

Send now your Spirit upon us and upon these gifts of
bread and wine,
that as we eat and drink we are swept up into your presence,
O God,
filled with your Spirit, and enabled to follow where you call.

We give thanks for the life and witness of this congregation,
and pray for our future paths, that, as we follow you into
new places,
you continue to enable us to serve and be a blessing to others.

May the love that we have experienced here continue to transform us.

May the grace that we have shared here continue to call others to yourself.

May the zeal that led to this church's foundation sustain us now.

May the memory of the blessings we have received here, enable us to bless others.

May the resources released from this congregation be used to further your realm,

that, at the end, we may come rejoicing into your presence forever more.

All **Amen.**

Post Communion Prayer

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die...a time to weep and a time to laugh...a time to mourn and a time to dance...a time to keep and a time to throw away...a time to tear and a time to sew.

As we give thanks for the toil of workers in this congregation over the last ... Y ... years,
we thank you again for feeding us with your very self
O Christ.

As we have tasted and seen that you are good,
we mix our weeping with our laughter,
our mourning with our dancing, and our rending and our sewing,
that as we throw away the assets of this place, we keep the
experience of your love.

We go from this place with all our mixed emotions
but sure in your hope for our future.

All **Amen.**

Litany of Thanksgiving

Blessed be the name of God,
whose Word has long been proclaimed within this
hallowed place.

All **We give you thanks, O God.**

As generations have prayed their prayers and sung your
praises here,
your Spirit has blessed countless worshippers.

All **We give you thanks, O God.**

We have celebrated the Lord's Supper here
and been nurtured by it through our journey in faith.

All **We give you thanks, O God.**

We have rejoiced here as believers have confessed faith
in Christ.

All **We give you thanks, O God.**

Here we have baptised our children and mourned our dead.

All **We give you thanks, O God.**

As new families have been created through marriage,
we, our parents, and our children have vowed here
to love, honour, and cherish always.

All **We give you thanks, O God.**

From within these walls many have gone out to serve you
in the world.

All **We give you thanks, O God.**

All As we go now from this house into a further journey of faith,
**we give you thanks, O God, through Jesus Christ
our Lord.
Amen.**

or

[note: this might be led by multiple voices. The symbol “◇” indicates a proposed change of reader. May need to be adapted to fit your building and its contents!]

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest
for herself,
where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.
Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing
your praise.
Happy are those whose strength is in you.

(Psalm 84:1-5a)

- ◇ God of love, we give thanks for this building, which has been a home for us.
- ◇ We give thanks for these *pews/chairs*, and all the people who have gathered here through the generations.
- ◇ We give thanks for these walls, and all the prayers and hopes they have sheltered.

- ◇ We give thanks for the organ, and all the music and singing that have carried your people's praises in this place.
- ◇ We give thanks for the Communion table and kitchen counter, communion set and coffee cups, remembering with gratitude all the hospitality and fellowship shared here.
- ◇ We give thanks for the story books and crayons, and all the children who have passed through our toddler group and Sunday school, and been part of the life of this church.
- ◇ We give thanks for the pulpit and lectern, for the reading and preaching of your Word in this place, and all the ministers and leaders who have served here.
- ◇ We give thanks for the peace of this place. The silence it holds. The memories it holds. Your presence here with us.

(silence)

Faithful one: you make all things new.

In your eternal love, nothing that has been will ever be lost.

Comfort us in our grief for all that is ending.

In our fearfulness of change, centre and steady us.

For our regrets, may we know your forgiveness.

Give us courage and hope for the future.

All **Amen.**

or

A Commendation and Committal into God's gentle keeping

All rise as they are able.

God of every good gift, we give thanks for the life of this congregation.

(at the font)

We give you thanks for the gift of faith, for those baptised here, who grew into faith through the loving kindness of ministers and elders, of Sunday School teachers and youth leaders.

(at the Table)

We give thanks for how you sustained your people,
Lord Jesus, at this your table,
giving yourself our nourishment and growth in grace,
gathering us into your presence in the heavenly places,
and sending us out strengthened for service.

(in the chancel)

We give thanks for couples who took their vows to love
each other here
for better and for worse, in sickness and in health.
We give thanks for the love that renews and strengthens
and for the grace it produces.
We also give thanks for the second chances that you give
your people
when things go wrong and for the open loving witness of
this congregation

in journeying with couples taking a second chance on love – even in the face of public hostility.

We give thanks for life's endings
as we remember those consoled by the ministry of this
church in death's darkest vale,
where gentle love, the silent touch, and a calm presence
meant so much to so many.

We give thanks too for those ordained to your service here
as Elders and Ministers,
each responding to your call to serve in this place
and whose names we may never know.

(at lectern or in pulpit with Bible slowly taken out of the church)

We give thanks O God, for your Word
proclaimed and enfleshed here in this place,
faithfully preached in season and out of season,
for how people responded to it and sanctified their communities.
Now, we ask that you send forth Spirit
as we take the Bible from this place,
that you renew the face of the earth,
that the witness of your disciples here will shine,
that resources released for mission will be fruitful,
that displaced members will find new homes
and that, in all things, we continue to give you thanks.

All **Amen.**

Liturgy of Closure

Synod Moderator or representative of the wider church

We give thanks to God for the ... Y ... years of Reformed witness in this place. We thank God for ... X ... United Reformed Church and its (Congregational/Presbyterian/Church of Christ) predecessors, for its members, friends and ministers, for the love, kindness and support shown over these years.

We ask forgiveness for the mistakes that we have made and we know that God's love will continue to surround us in the days to come.

All **We give thanks to God for all the faithful witness of this church.**

Congregation to stand

Do you, the members and friends of this church, release ... M ... from the duty of being of your Minister?

All **We do, with the help of God.**

Do you offer your encouragement and prayers for the continuing ministry of the (continuing pastorate or group)?

All **We do, with the help of God.**

On behalf of the wider church and the ... Z ... Synod of the United Reformed Church, I witness the words of thankfulness, blessing and release spoken today.

Let us pray

O God, we give you thanks for remembered times when we have shared the life of faith. We thank you for times that we have shared in worship, learning and service.

We pray that your Spirit will continue to guide your people (eg of the continuing pastorate) in the days to come. In Jesus' name.

All **Amen.**

Statement of Closure

Today we have celebrated with thanksgiving the life and work of the faith community of ... X ... United Reformed Church. It has served as a witness to God's presence for ... Y ... years. It has provided refuge, comfort, and challenges for God's people. It has served for generations the faithful people of this community.

The building, dedicated and named ... X ... United Reformed Church together with the land on which it stands, and all objects remaining in it, we now commend to other purposes.

We declare that as of ... X ... it is no longer the place of meeting of a congregation of The United Reformed Church.

Closing Prayer

(for a church moving from one building to another)

O God, as in your great goodness you have blessed the many ministries carried on by this congregation in this building, so, now and in the days and years to come, we pray that you may bless greatly your many ministries in your ongoing Church.

Bless those persons who have worshipped in this building,
and will now be worshipping in their new/shared building.
As disciples of the risen Christ,
may we be channels at all times of your steadfast love;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Blessing

May the One who bought us to birth and in whose arms we die,
give us grace, comfort, and joy.

May the One who, like a mother, nurtures the people with
his own self,
give us peace, balm, and healing.

May the One whose perfume we smell,
whose embrace we feel, and whose comfort we seek,
give us time, challenge, and perspective to heal and flourish.

And the blessing of Almighty God,
Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Fire of Love,
or Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and evermore,

All **Amen.**

or

God remains with us, though we let go of our cherished place.
God remains with us, though we find new congregations
to call home.

God remains with us, this day and always.

God is eternally for you and with you.

In the love of God the Father,

 or In the love of God the Maker,
in the grace of God the Son

 or in the grace of God the Word made flesh
and in the peace of God the Spirit.

All **Amen.**

or

May the strength of God go with you,
may you find the love of God waiting for you,
may the peace of God keep you.

And may the strength, love and peace of God
Author of all, living Word, and Voice of love within

 or Father, Son and Holy Spirit
remain with you now and forever.

All **Amen.**

URC Worship Additional Resources to complement
this book can be found online, along with this Worship
Book, as A4 downloadable versions in PDF and Word
format for printing: www.urch.org.uk/worship-book

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Bless, and keep us, Lord	471			
Give thanks for life		736		
Great God, your love has called us here	339	484	499	
Great is thy faithfulness	96	153	51	200
Lord, for the years	603	159	470	428
Lord of all hopefulness	531	166	526	882
Now thank we all our God	72	182	81	486
The Church is wherever God's people are praising	583	522		
And art thou come with us to dwell	136			
We are marching in the light of God	555	516	483	954
God is working his purpose out	573	235		189
All people that on earth do dwell	712	63	1	20
Spirit of truth and grace		608		
Spirit of God come dwell within me		722		

RS – Rejoice and Sing | CH4 – Church Hymnary 4 | StF – Singing the Faith | MP – Mission Praise

Not in our hymn books:

- o God marks no endings, only new beginnings (tune: R&S 603, words: © 2006 Stainer & Bell Ltd)