

Worship Resources for Closing a Church Building and/or the Amalgamation of Congregations

One liturgy cannot encompass all the dynamics that are involved in the closing of a church building and/or the amalgamation of congregations.

In some cases, a church building will be sold because it is no longer adequate to the needs of a growing congregation. In this instance, it is necessary to determine what artefacts, if any, from the old building will be incorporated into the new. In some cases, entire stained glass windows can be used in the new building, and this should be noted in some suitable form in the act of worship that closes the old building.

When congregations are amalgamated, historic items from the various amalgamating congregations need to be noted and attention drawn to their importance, symbolic or otherwise, in the worship of God that was offered in that place.

If a congregation has grown small and is being amalgamated with another congregation, there may only be a few participants. In other cases, congregations may be much larger and are either moving to a new location on their own or are joining another congregation to affect a much more useful worship site. Each situation needs to be the focus of careful worship preparation on the part of congregational and/or Presbytery leadership. The document that follows is merely a suggestion of how some of these situations could be handled. It is offered as a guide to those responsible for such events.

It is assumed that a normal act of worship has already taken place. The following forms would come towards the end of the service. Those participating would be chosen by the moderator if it is a presbytery service. At the appropriate time, the minister chosen to lead would step forward and the following order could then take place.

These liturgies are an edited and expanded version of an original service developed by Dorothy Naylor, and altered for a local situation by the Rev. Mary Whitson. The editor of this present version was the Rev. Dr. James A. Thomson, minister emeritus of Knox Presbyterian Church, Bracebridge, Ontario.

The Closing of a Church Building

[If the event being celebrated is the closing of a small congregation, those participating might gather in a circle around the communion table. Otherwise, they should simply occupy their usual places in the pews or chairs in the sanctuary.]

Minister: This worship space has been a blessing for us. As we leave this place of worship we pause to recognize those things that have been a means of blessing to us.

Member 1: This worship space has been a blessing for us. It has been made holy by the presence of God through the Holy Spirit among us. The learning that has occurred for us, the people we have been with, and the knowledge that God has met us here in the Word that has been read and proclaimed, and in the sacraments that have bound us to God and to each other, have created here a true community of faith. This sanctuary has been a blessing for our faith community.

Minister: This worship space has been a means of blessing for this people.

People: Thanks be to God.

Member 2: [If there has been a cross in the sanctuary] [Person stands near the cross]
This cross has been a visible reminder of our faith. It has been a symbol of the suffering of Christ, the source and inspiration of our community. It is also a reminder that death is a part of life and that the Christian hope that is ours transcends that experience. It has been a symbol to all who have worshipped God here of his promise of a new life in the here and now. It has reminded us of the ministry to which we all are called. This cross has been a blessing for our community.

Minister: This cross has been a means of blessing for this people.

People: Thanks be to God.

Member 3: [Standing by the communion table]
Around this table all have been welcomed. Here worshippers have been fed and nourished by the symbols of the faith and the presence of Christ mediated in and through them. At this table we have felt the presence of saints of the past in all times and places. This table has been the means of calling us together, binding us to one another in a spirit of commitment and love which overrides differences and uncertainties. This table has been a blessing for our community.

Minister: This communion table has been a means of blessing for this people.

People: Thanks be to God.

Member 4: [Standing by the baptismal font]

The baptismal font stands before us as a symbol of God's blessing of many of our people through the ages it has served us. Through its water and by prayer, infants, children and adults have become members of the church universal and have been welcomed into this particular community of faith. Here faith has been affirmed by the community of faith. In the waters of baptism we have died and risen with Christ and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This font has been a means of blessing for our community.

Minister: This baptismal font has been a means of blessing for this people.

People: Thanks be to God.

Member 5: [Standing in the pulpit. If a lectern has been used for readings, the following liturgy could be split, with the lectern referring to the reading of Scripture and the pulpit referring to the proclamation of the Word written.]

From this pulpit the biblical story has been read and interpreted. From it our horizons of faith and life have been widened and our souls stirred. From it our minds have been enlightened, hope encouraged and our lives challenged. From this pulpit the tragedies of life and the joys of life have combined to challenge us to a larger measure of God's abundant life for all. This pulpit has been a means of blessing for our community.

Minister: This pulpit has been a means of blessing for this people.

People: Thanks be to God.

Member 6: [Standing in the choir loft and/or beside the musical instrument]

Music has also been a means of blessing for us. With the help of organ and/or piano and other instruments of music, we have learned the faith through praising God. The gifts of music have helped us to experience God in this place. Music has been a means of blessing for our community.

Minister: Music has indeed been a means of blessing for this people.

People: Thanks be to God.

[Here, attention may be drawn to stained glass windows that have pictured the faith for many. Other memorials may also be referred to in a similar manner, to remind us of those who have gone before us and served this church well.]

Minister: The things we have named have been ways for the Spirit of God to move through this community. We give thanks for the way in which they have been used and for the gifts of the Spirit, which they embraced. Some of them may find continued service to God in new ways in other places. However, like all temporal things, some may simply be brought to an end. For their service to God in this place we give God thanks.

People: May God's name be praised. Amen.

[The service would now end with a hymn of thanksgiving and with the blessing of God.]

An Act of Amalgamation

[The presbytery concerned will already have enacted the amalgamation of the congregations involved. This service represents the formal integration of that decision.]

[Persons from the amalgamating congregations will have been selected beforehand to represent their respective congregations and as such will act as agents of their congregations.]

Moderator of presbytery or his/her designate:

Will the following persons from _____ church stand now before me.

Clerk of Session _____, chair of the Board of Managers _____, representatives of women's groups _____, representative of the church school and of youth _____. [Each representative shall be identified by name]

Will the following persons from _____ church stand now before me as well. Clerk of Session _____, chair of the Board of Managers _____, representatives of women's groups _____, representative of the church school and of youth _____.

[This list can either be lengthened to include other groups, or shortened as the case may be decided.]

To the representatives of these two [or more] congregations, as you represent the congregations of which you are members, are you now prepared to implement the decision of the Presbytery of _____ to amalgamate the congregations of _____ and _____ into the new congregation of _____?

The representatives shall make reply as follows:

We the representatives of _____ are so prepared.

We the representatives of _____ are so prepared.

Moderator: We have gathered in the sight of God and this community to bring together into one congregation these two historic communities of faith. This act is similar to, but not quite the same as, the rite of marriage, bringing as it does two separate families together into one new one. You each have your own history, customs and means of working together and you have now come before this presbytery that we might, in the sight of God and this community, make you one.

Do you who represent the congregations of _____ and _____ pledge that the congregations for which you both speak shall accept each other as members together in the new congregation of _____. Do you each receive the other as members in full standing within this congregation and do you each receive the other as you would receive the Lord Jesus Christ, extending to one and all the rights and privileges and responsibilities of membership in this new church?

Response: We do!

Moderator: Do both of you together accept the amalgamation of the Session, the Board of Managers, the church school and any other groups common to each other in the new congregation?

Response: We do and with God's help we will work together.

Moderator: By the authority invested in me as moderator of the Presbytery of _____, I declare these two congregations to be one, amalgamated and joined into one blended congregation. May God guide you as you now implement together this undertaking.

[The Moderator will offer prayer on behalf of the new congregation.]

Moderator: I now declare that this congregation shall now be known as _____ within the Presbytery of _____ and The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We invite the representatives of what were once two congregations and which is now one to extend the right hand of fellowship to each other. I also invite the members of presbytery to extend the right hand of fellowship to the representatives of the new congregation.

[A charge will be given to the new congregation]

[The service shall continue as planned or close with the benediction.]