Worship at the Closing of a Church

Worship at the Closing of a Church is a service of the classis for acknowledging and celebrating the ministry of a congregation that is coming to a close. Preparation for the service may include interviewing members of the congregation, listening for stories of ministry which might be shared in the service, and gathering mementos of significant events in the life of the congregation. If material symbols of that church’s ministry were donated through memorial gifts, it may be appropriate to ask the donors if they would like the gift returned or if they would like to see it shared with another ministry or mission.

VOTUM

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Amen. Psalm 124:8

SENTENCES

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 plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Moment of silent reflection.

DECLARATION OF INTENT

The following or similar words may be said:
We are here to celebrate the life of N________________ Church,
to give thanks to God for the gifts that have come to us
and to others through this ministry,
to acknowledge our sadness at the close of this ministry,
and to affirm again our faith in Jesus Christ.
Let us be grateful for God’s gifts,
honest about our sorrow, open in our love,
trusting in Jesus Christ, the only head of the church.
The service today marks a passage for this congregation.
A ministry is coming to a close;
something new is about to be born.
God is calling the members of this congregation to a new ministry.
Congregations are formed and congregations are disbanded,
but the Lord our God reigns forever.

HYMN

PRAYER

O God of peace,
who has taught us that in returning and rest
we shall be saved,
in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength:
by the might of your Spirit lift us,
we pray, to your presence,
where we may be still and know that you are God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Let us humble ourselves before God,
opening our lives to God’s healing presence,
forsaking all that separates us from God and neighbor.
Let us think not only of personal evil
but also of our communal sins
of family, class, race, and nation.
Let us confess to God
whatever has wounded us or brought injury to others,
that we may receive mercy
and become for each other ministers of God’s grace.

Let us confess our sin together.
CONFESSION OF SIN

Merciful God, we confess
that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart and mind and strength;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
help us amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S FORGIVING GRACE

Hear the good news!
If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!

2 Corinthians 5:17

HYMN

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SCRIPTURE

SERMON

PRAYER

Remember, O Lord, your church,
to deliver her from all evil,
and make her perfect in your love;
and gather together from the four winds
the sanctified church into your kingdom,
which you have prepared for her.
For yours is the power and the glory evermore! Amen.
THANKSGIVING FOR THE MINISTRY OF N___________ CHURCH

Throughout the years, God has blessed N___________ Church, using the gifts of pastors and members to bring help and healing, changing lives in the name of Christ. We celebrate this!

Here may follow a brief program celebrating the past ministry of the congregation, or two or three testimonials reflecting on the ministry of the congregation may be shared by members of church.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

How can we thank you, O God, for the ministry of this church over these past ___ years?
For every person who has shown the love of Christ to another, for every quiet act of service which helped another, for every song of praise offered to you from the depths of a grateful heart, for every prayer uttered here which gave you honor and glory, for all the ways in which you have guided and directed these your people,

Here additional specific prayers of thanksgiving may be offered.

for all these gifts of ministry,

we give you thanks and praise!

DOXOLOGY

RITE OF PASSAGE TO NEW FORMS OF MINISTRY

Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 43:19

It is time for the ministry of this congregation to come to an end.
It is also time to look at the new thing God is doing, as the people of N___________ Church journey on to offer gifts of ministry in new ways and in other places.
The symbols of ministry at N__________ Church, such as the communion chalice and plate, pitcher, baptismal bowl, pulpit Bible, etc., if not returned to those who gave them as memorials, may here be offered by a representative of the congregation to a representative of a new ministry of the classis, or to an officer of the classis who will hold them for use in future churches. The following is said by another representative of N__________ Church:

We offer these gifts to you, brothers and sisters, in celebration of the new thing God is doing through your ministries. May you continue to be “a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”

_Isaiah 42:6-7_

**CHARGE TO THE CONGREGATION**

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, Congregation of N____________ Church:

Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

_Adapted from Hebrews 10:19-22_

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.

_Hebrews 10:23-24_

Classis president (to congregation of N__________ Church):

Beloved sisters and brothers, the church is not this building; it is you who are called by God to be followers of Jesus Christ. The church of Jesus Christ needs you
and the gifts the Spirit has instilled within you
to build up Christ’s body.
So we charge and encourage you
to find a place of worship
where you may be encouraged in your faith
and where you may encourage others.

If the classis has already helped the remaining members join with other con-
gregations, the president may add:

We commend you to the welcoming and healing embrace
of the congregation/s of N____________ Church/es.

A representative from each receiving congregation may welcome members of
the congregation with the right hand of fellowship or with an embrace.

HYMN

BENEDICTION