

PREPARATION OF LITURGIES ON THE OCCASION OF THE CLOSING OF A PARISH

The closing of a parish church building is a traumatic event for all of its parishioners. In many ways it can be likened to the death of a person. Parishioners, both those now participating in this parish's life and those who claim a certain identity with the parish because of growing up there, feel a great loss. When the parish community makes the final decision to close this parish building it is incumbent on the parish leadership to help parishioners grieve their loss and move on.

Very important to this grieving process is the recognition that theologically the church is not dependent on any building. "The church is the People of God that exists in local communities. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's body." As Christ's body, the church continues her existence even though the building in which this local assembly gathers no longer exists. Her existence, however, is changed. She must be assimilated into a new assembly. She must bring the gifts of each individual member into new relationships. What does not change is the ultimate purpose of the church itself...the mission which Christ gave us: "Go now, teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This Guide for the Preparation of Liturgies on the Occasion of the Closing of a Parish is modeled after the Order of Christian Funerals. As such, it contains suggestions for three services:

1. A Vigil Service of Grieving provides a time to gently accompany the community in its adjustment to the fact of the death of this church building
2. The Closing Celebration of the Eucharist provides a time to solemnly celebrate the life of this community
3. The Rite of Leave Taking is a time for the community to bid its final farewells, to leave the building, closing behind it the doors that had housed it for its existence

A VIGIL SERVICE OF GRIEVING

Introductory Rites

- Greeting
- Opening Song
- Invitation to Prayer
- Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

- First Reading
- Responsorial Psalm
- Gospel
- Homily

Prayer of Intercession

- Litany
- Lord's Prayer
- Concluding Prayer

Concluding Rite

- Blessing

SAMPLE VIGIL SERVICE OF GRIEVING

The community gathers. A few moments before the beginning of the service the bells of the church toll... or the organ can simulate the tolling of bells. The presider enters in silence and greets the gathered assembly.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Greeting:

- May the God of hope give you the fullness of peace, and may the Lord of life be always with you.
- The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
- May the God of all consolation be with you.

Opening Song:

Suggestions:

*Be Not Afraid
The Cry of the Poor
Eye Has Not Seen
You Are Near
Day is Done
The King of Love My Shepherd Is
Litany of the Saints*

Prayer of Intercession:

Lord Jesus, by your resurrection, you renew the universe;
you change our death into your life;
we pray to you:

RS. Jesus Christ, risen Lord, have mercy on us.

Give us kindness wherever you find bitterness,
confidence wherever you find distress,
joy wherever you find sorrow;
we pray to you:

RS. Jesus Christ, risen Lord, have mercy on us.

Give us humility wherever pride reigns,
pardon wherever offense abides,
grace wherever sin abounds;
we pray to you:

RS. Jesus Christ, risen Lord, have mercy on us.

Give us love wherever hatred burns,
hope wherever despair is crying,
faith wherever doubt prevails;
we pray to you:

RS. Jesus Christ, risen Lord, have mercy on us.

Give us a new spirit,
a new heart,
and new hope in your holy resurrection;
we pray to you:

RS. Jesus Christ, risen Lord, have mercy on us.

Let us pray for the coming of the kingdom as Jesus taught us:

Our Father....

Concluding Prayer:

Lord God,
you are attentive to the voice of our pleading.
Let us find in your Son
comfort in our sadness,
certainty in our doubt,
and courage to live through this hour.
Make our faith strong
through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Before we leave this place it is important to remember all the people, all the events, all the good times and bad times that have forged us together as the parish of

name

Members of the community are invited to share stories about the people, events, etc. of this parish.

CONCLUDING RITE

Blessing:

May the God of hope fill us
With every joy and with peace, in the faith! RS. Amen

May hope overflow in us
Through the power of the Holy Spirit! RS. Amen

May almighty God bless you,
The Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

SAMPLE CLOSING CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

This will be the last celebration of the Eucharist in this building which has housed the parish community. As such it needs to be a celebration of joy and thanksgiving for all the good memories which the congregation will take with it. Cardinal Maida has given permission that for this celebration the parish may choose to use the prayers and readings from the patronal feast of the parish...provided that this celebration does not occur during Advent, Lent, the Easter Season, or solemnities of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and saints listed in the General Calendar.

Introductory Rites *After the greeting the presider speaks to the assembly in these or similar words.*

Presider: We are God's temple, God's holy people. Today we gather to give thanks for the _____ years that this building St. _____ has been our home. It is here that we have gathered each Sunday to hear God's word, to praise and thank him for his presence in our lives, to receive his body and blood as our food for the journey of life. It is from here that we have been sent forth, transformed, to be Christ's presence in our community. Today we gather here for the last time, and prepare ourselves for a journey to a new home. Let us prepare our minds and hearts for the mystery we will celebrate and for the peace and mercy of God we will need on our journey.

Penitential Rite *A sung version of the Kyrie might be appropriate for this celebration.*

Gloria *This needs to be festive and accompanied by the ringing of the bells, where possible.*

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Prayer of the Faithful *A sung response would be appropriate
[Some possible petitions]*

1. For the Pope and local bishop, that God may bless them with wisdom and insight as they continue to shepherd the Church, we pray to the Lord.
2. We remember with particular tenderness the pastors and local leadership who have served in this parish throughout its history. In gratitude, we pray to the Lord.
3. For other parishes, schools, and institutions throughout the country facing significant changes and transitions, that the love and solidarity of all Catholics may overcome all fear and sadness, we pray to the Lord.
4. For the founders, benefactors, and all past parishioners of this parish; for all those whose faith, vision, and generosity has been the cornerstone of our parish's history, we pray to the Lord.
5. For the priests and vowed religious who have faithfully served this parish through preaching and teaching, prayer and pastoral care, we pray to the Lord.
6. For the ability to rejoice in the blessings we have received through this parish and for the courage to move onward with hope, we pray to the Lord.
7. For the unsung heroes of St. _____ Parish who have contributed so much of themselves for the success of the parish, we pray to the Lord.
8. For the dead, especially those buried from this church over its _____-year history, we pray to the Lord.

Presider:

Lord God, in Christ you made us your people, a chosen race, a royal priesthood. Wherever you lead us we will continue to be your holy people, your imperishable temple. Hear us as we raise our minds and hearts to you through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Mass proceeds as usual.

At communion time, Eucharistic ministers consume all the remaining Eucharist... both the bread and wine. The tabernacle doors are open and all vessels are purified.

At the end of the Liturgy of the Eucharist two Eucharistic ministers remove the altar cloth. The presider incenses the altar one last time...or places coals in the brazier and places the brazier on the altar.

A hymn of thanksgiving is sung by the entire assembly. All stand for the singing of this hymn.

The Prayer after Communion is said.

Final Blessing

The Lord of earth and heaven
has assembled you before him this day
to bid farewell to this house of prayer.
May he fill you with the blessings of heaven. Amen

God the Father wills that all his children
scattered throughout the world
become one family in his Son.
May he make you his temple,
the dwelling place of his Holy Spirit. Amen

May God free you from every bond of sin,
dwell within you and give you joy.
May you live with him for ever
in the company of all his saints. Amen

May almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Final Hymn: *A hymn of praise and thanksgiving would be appropriate.*

THE RITE OF LEAVE TAKING

During the singing of the final hymn all are invited to come forward and kiss the altar as a gesture of leave taking. The assembly leaves following the cross and gathers outside close to the front doors.

When the presider arrives at this place he faces the doors of the building:

Here we and those who have gone before us have celebrated our joys and sorrows. In this church we have encountered Jesus Christ in Word, sacrament, and one another. Now after _____ years of faith, with thanks to God for the good accomplished here, I declare this Church of St. _____ closed.

The presider closes and locks the doors. Several parishioners seal the doors with purple ribbon.

All depart.

RITE FOR THE MERGING OF PARISHES

BEFORE MASS BEGINS

Hospitality: Ministers of welcome should be stationed outside and inside the welcoming church (as the situation permits).

Ministers: There should, if possible, be an equal number of ministers from both parishes involved in this liturgy. Worship commissions of both parishes will work together to develop liturgical procedures based on the traditions of both parishes. Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and servers will have to be trained in the combined procedures.

Altar: The altar should be bare as the liturgy begins. It will be dressed at the Preparation of the Gifts. Representatives of both parishes will take part in this rite.

Water and Oils: A large container that can be carried, of blessed water from each of the merging churches. This water will be mixed and used in the Sprinkling Rite. The Holy Oils may be mixed together and placed in the Ambry, if possible.

Participation aids: It would be helpful to have a special program printed for this occasion which could contain a message of welcome, the music for the celebration with the proper copyrights, and especially the people's responses for the Blessing Over the Water and the Proclamation of Consent.

Introductory Rites

The liturgy should begin with a full procession including cross, candles, incense and Book of the Gospels. It is important that the Entrance Song (as well as all the music used in this celebration) is well known to and reflects the diversity of both communities so that there may be full participation by everyone present. Representatives from both merging parishes carry in the large vessel of blessed water from their parish as part of the procession.

The procession moves to a visible place where the two containers of water can be slowly poured into a single vessel or font.

The Celebrant greets the people and welcomes them.

Invocation Over Blessed Water

Celebrant: My dear brothers and sisters, we have been called to this water that we may share in the faith of the one Church and that we may have eternal life.
By the mystery of this consecrated water, may we rededicate our lives to the Gospel as a new community of faith.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Celebrant: Father, God of mercy, through the waters of baptism you have filled us with new life as your very own children.

All: Blessed be God. *(All sing or say this or another suitable acclamation.)*

Celebrant: From all who are baptized in water and the Holy Spirit,
you have formed one people, united by your Son Jesus Christ.

All: *(Sing or say the acclamation as above.)*

Celebrant: You have set us free and filled our hearts with the Spirit of your love, that we may live in your peace.

All: *(Sing or say the acclamation as above.)*

Celebrant: You call those who have been baptized to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ to people every where.

All: *(Sing or say the acclamation as above.)*

Celebrant: You call us to this cleansing water and to new birth. By sharing the faith of your Church may we have eternal life.

We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

All: Amen.

----- Sprinkling of the people with Holy Water -----

Gloria:

Sung, the church bells may be rung to add to the festivity.

Opening Prayer:

In Ordinary Time the Opening Prayer may be taken from the Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar.

Celebrant: Lord, fill this place with your presence, and extend your hand to all those who call upon you.
May your word here proclaimed and your sacraments here celebrated strengthen the hearts of all your faithful.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

In Ordinary Time the readings for the Dedication of a Church and an Altar might be used. Lectionary [701 – 706].

Homily

Renewal of Baptismal Commitment

Celebrant: My brothers and sisters, God our loving Father calls us together to be one body in Christ our Lord. As we come together as one community let us renew the promises we made in baptism, when we promised to reject sin and to serve God in faith as his holy people, his Church.

Celebrant: Do you reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children?

All: I do.

Celebrant: Do you reject the glamour of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?

All: I do.

Celebrant: Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?

All: I do

Celebrant: Do you believe I God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

All: I do.

Celebrant: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

All: I do.

Celebrant: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

All: I do.

Proclamation of Consent

Celebrant: I ask the people of _____ and _____ is it your intention to become one faith community.

All: It is.

Celebrant: Do you promise to walk together for the unity of the Church?

All: We do.

Celebrant: Are you resolved to unite yourself more closely with Christ, and try to become more like him?

All: We are.

Celebrant: Do you promise to celebrate the sacraments together with sincere devotion?

All: We do.

Celebrant: May the Lord in his love keep you close to him always, and may he bring all of you to eternal life.

All: Amen.

Decree from the Archbishop:

The opening paragraph of the decree from the Archbishop is read ending with the name of the new parish.

INSTALLATION OF THE PASTOR

Presentation of the Pastor-Elect

Presider: My dear friends, because I am aware of your pastoral needs and am confident of Father N's qualifications for the office of pastor, I now commend Father _____ to you as your new pastor.

Welcome by the people.

Alleluia.

----- Pastor comes to stand before the bishop -----

Presentation of the Parish Clergy and Staff

Presider: N._____, my brother, Father(s) N_____, Deacon N_____ and N_____ (other staff members) will assist you in the pastoral care of the people of this parish. Share this ministry in a spirit of mutual trust, common prayer, and genuine concern.

----- The new pastor is greeted by his associates in the parish ministry -----

Presentation of the Parish Council

Presider: Father _____, this is the pastoral council of _____ parish. It is the voice of your people and will assist and counsel you as you minister to this parish. They bring with them the names of all the baptized. Always be attentive to the needs that your council expresses.

Pastor: My friends, I pledge to seek your counsel, guidance, and advice in the spiritual and temporal care of my pastorate.

The members of the parish council immediately come forward and greet the new pastor.
The parish registries from the merging parishes are brought forward and placed on the
table in front of the altar by a member of each of the parishes.

PROFESSION OF FAITH AND OATH

Presider: Remember, my brother _____, always be a loving father, a gentle shepherd, and a wise teacher of your people, so that you may lead them to Christ who will strengthen all that you do.

General Intercessions:

The General Intercessions should be carefully composed to address the new parish situation. The following are some suggestions that might be modified to fit the situation.

For the Holy Father, our Bishop and priests, may they have the courage to lead the church in faith, we pray to the Lord...

For the people of _____ and _____ as they come together as _____ may they be a living sign of the presence of God to all whom they meet, we pray to the Lord...

For patience and understanding as we grow together as a family of faith, we pray to the Lord...

For all who have gone before us in faith, especially the deceased members of _____ and _____, may we always remember their faith and their good works, we pray to the Lord...

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Members of both communities should be a part of the procession of gifts and the dressing of the altar. The altar might be clothed with a new altar cloth, candles, etc. If possible use incense.

Mass proceeds as usual.

Concluding Rites

After communion devotional items may be brought forward and placed in shrines or other appropriate places. The celebrant or another might explain what the items are, why they are important to the community and where they will be placed as a sign that two communities have become one.

A Solemn Blessing should be used.