

RESOURCES FOR CLOSURE OF A CONGREGATION

This Resource begins with a brief comment about “property grief”, and suggestions about using a “Memory Book”.

Pages 3-10 contain resources which can be used in the “Closing Service” of a congregation.

From p11, 4 liturgies offered as models for closing services

Permission is given for any or all of these resources can be adapted for local use. Indeed, it is expected that the leaders who will be planning worship for the Closure of a Congregation will be careful to ensure that the particular needs of the people are identified and affirmed.

PROPERTY GRIEF

It is important to acknowledge the grief some members feel when a church building is closed. Sometimes people from the community that aren't involved with the church also feel a sense of loss. The closing service is a time to celebrate what God has done and to give thanks to God for all the mission and ministry that has happened from the church building. It is also a time to remember that God is always doing something new (Isaiah) 'Behold, I am doing a new thing'. Our God leads us on in new ways in mission and ministry, as a pilgrim people, for his name's sake.

MEMORY BOOK

One idea to help people with their property grief is to make a memory book. A couple of churches have picked up the idea recently and found it has been helpful.

A memory book could be in various forms, probably easiest as a display folder or two but could also be a collection of pages bound into a book. It is essential that people are able to read this book over the coming months and in a display folder the pages are protected. It is important that all are able to 'flick through' the book and that it be on display by the parent church for at least 3 months after the closure. Thereafter it should still be accessible to all.

Possible inclusions for memory book:-

- Signatures of all who attend the closing service (page with columns to fill in – name/address/association with 'Smith' Uniting church - please state association – eg member at closing, past member, live nearby, attended Sunday School, married/baptised here etc)
- Pages where people can contribute a memory (see below for detail)
- Photos of closing service
- Photo of building
- **Brief** history of church (written by someone who has attended for a long time and has a strong attachment to the church)
- Any old photos of the life of the congregation (eg historical photos, Sunday School picnic photos etc)
- Order of service for closing service
- Minute of Church Council to close building and/or congregation
- Page on God's mission & ministry **continuing** in this community area (brief)
- Register of any significant items and where they are going (eg baptism font now at ...

Uniting Church, WWI Honour Roll given to ... RSL, include photos if possible).

Pages where people can contribute a memory

This could be A4 pages with various titles as watermarks or titles - eg 'Thanks to God for the life of ... Church', 'We remember with thanks to God', '... Uniting Church – a place where God's love has been shown' etc

- ❖ Write a memory, a Bible verse or draw a picture
- ❖ Some of the long standing members may like to do a page themselves together with their families before or after the closing service
- ❖ Drawings from Sunday School.

Or it could be small pieces of paper (or bright post-it notes) that people are invited to write on during the service – stuck to butchers' paper or a whiteboard. Later these could be glued onto A4 pages for the memory book.

This is a time to use your imagination and creativity. This is also a good way to provide a historical document for the closure of a building but more importantly, it helps the remaining congregation members and also others affected (family members/members of community) to deal with their grief and move forward.

These are just a collection of thoughts and we would be delighted to receive any feedback or other ideas that you have seen or used.

RESOURCES FOR CLOSING SERVICES

These prayers and liturgies have been collected to provide ideas for closing services. The wording can be changed to suit your congregation's situation. It is appropriate for a copy of the closing service to be filed with an appropriate Synod body as part of the history of the church building.

Disbursement of Material property

If any items (communion plate, furniture, books) other are to be given to another congregation or to persons, the following form may be adapted:

The communion vessels and cloths are to be presented to *the NNN congregation where they will continue to be used to the glory of God.*

The baptismal registers and archives are being presented to the Synod Archives to be preserved.

The pulpit Bible is being given to the *Jones family, whose grandfather presented it.*

The *Uniting in Worship* People's Books are being taken *as a memorial for those who want one.*

The brass vases are being given to the *local hospital, etc.*

The honour roll is being given to the *NNN RSL.*

Welcome & Call to Worship

We come this day to worship God
as many have worshipped before us.

We come knowing that today marks the end of an era
of almost XX years of Christian worship on this site.

We come too with the knowledge that God's light shines!
It shines in the darkness to point the way,
it shines in our hearts to warm our responses,
it shines in the face of Jesus to illuminate our being.

Let us worship the God of light who will always be with us.

Call to Worship or Benediction

Be confident; hold your heads up high
God's glorious presence is with us.

Be confident; rejoice in solidarity
God's love will strengthen us.

Be confident; face the unknown future
God is present for us, in time and beyond.

Be confident; be ready to change
God has entrusted us to do God's work!

Amen

Prayer of Confession

God of our future, we seek the safety of what we know.

Free us to let go, and step out in faith.

God of our past, you appear and we do not know you.

***Free us from our preconceptions,
that we may see you as you really are.***

God of our present, who is always with us.

***Free us from all distraction,
so that knowing you now,
we may know you when you come again. Amen***

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Gracious and hospitable God, we give thanks for the men and women who first established the church of Christ in this place;

For all those who followed their Lord
in loving words and deeds and prayers.

We give thanks to the Lord who is good, whose love remains forever sure.

For all the hopes, fears, joys and sorrows
that have been brought into this house of prayer;
for the times of renewal
and profound decisions made here.

We give thanks to the Lord who is good, whose love remains forever sure.

For those who gladly expressed their faith
Through the music of organ and choir
Or in caring for finance and administration.

We give thanks to the Lord who is good, whose love remains forever sure.

For those who led education programs,
and all who grew in the knowledge of God in Christ;
For those who worked lovingly in the kitchen
and all who cared for the buildings and property.

We give thanks to the Lord who is good, whose love remains forever sure.

For the gospel of grace preached in this place
and for the sacraments celebrated at font and table;
For the people whose faith has been nurtured here
and who first knew God's love in this sanctuary.

We give thanks to the Lord who is good, whose love remains forever sure.

We pray for those who have allowed this property to be sold
that your work and witness may be strengthened elsewhere –
(that their sacrifice will allow your work to be done in another place so
that your love might bring healing to those who suffer.)
May their cross become the instrument of your resurrection.

We give thanks to the Lord who is good, whose love remains forever sure.

Loving God of the Church, Creator, Sustainer, Forgiver and Inspirer,
on this day of remembrance, thanksgiving and hope
we praise you for all that has passed

and trust you for all that is to come.

May your work and witness continue to be strengthened in XX.

***With the assurance in the presence of the risen Christ –
to heal our hurts, dampen our frustrations, and lead us on,
we move forward to the future, in your grace. Amen***

Prayer of Release

Gracious God, our Alpha and Omega
through your great goodness
this building has been used for your glory
in worship, prayer, witness and service.

We thank you for being with us
through this congregation over the years,
guiding, challenging, comforting and upholding us.

We thank you for all holy memories of people and events
which this place holds for us.

By your Holy Spirit, grant us the grace to relinquish this building,
that we may go forth in obedience to Christ our Lord,
to worship you in other places,
wherever the church is found.

Lead us on as a pilgrim people
to live and work, and to call upon your Name.

Turn our sadness into joy as we remember the way you have led us.
Guide us forward with our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ our Lord,
in the power of the Holy Spirit. *Amen*

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God, God of all times and all places, we bring before you these prayers for the world and
for your church in the world.

Where people groan under the weight of suffering
May your love be made real in this world of ours

We pray for those whose lives are made difficult by the actions of others - by the tragedy of
modern warfare, by the unfettered greed of big business, by the laws of uncaring governments, by
the prejudice of those twisted by hatred of race, politics or religion.

May your love be made real in this world of ours

We pray for those whose lives are made difficult by events or processes beyond their control -
those who do not have enough to eat, those who do not have enough resources to live in comfort,
those who have experienced natural disaster.

May your love be made real in this world of ours

We pray for those whose lives are difficult because of the ways of the modern world - those who are lonely in a world teeming with humanity, those who are lost in a world where satellites tell us exactly where we are, for those who are tempted by the glitter and the glitz, for those who must have the latest of everything.

May your love be made real in this world of ours

We pray for those whose futures are uncertain - those facing an ongoing struggle with illness, those dealing with constant pain, those who have lost someone important from their lives, those who have life changing decisions to make.

May your love be made real in this world of ours

We pray for your Church in the world. Where there is hunger may she bring food, where there is war may she bring peace, where there is hatred may she bring love, where there is hopelessness may she bring faith.

May your love be made real in this world of ours

We pray for those who have allowed this property to be sold so that your work and witness may be strengthened elsewhere - that their sacrifice will allow your work to be done in another place so that your love might bring healing to those who suffer. May their cross become the instrument of your resurrection.

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace. So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honour of your name.

Amen

Litany of Farewell

Gracious and hospitable God,
For all those who were baptised in this church

Thanks be to God

For all who were confirmed and who came to faith
through the ministry of this church

Thanks be to God

For all who were married in this holy place
and who grew in faith, hope and love

Thanks be to God

For all who served as Sunday School teachers,
youth workers, Bible study leaders, lay preachers and Ministers,
and all who nurtured people in Christian witness

Thanks be to God

For all who have worshipped here
For all for whom the memories of this place
continue to encourage their faith in God

Thanks be to God

[Picking up hymn books and other symbols, the Bible, the Paten and Chalice, the Water Jug of Baptism]

And so, to establish a home in another place
with other members of the family of Christ in XX

We go in faith and peace

OR

And so, to establish a home in other places
with other members of the family of Christ

We go in faith and peace

To continue the journey of faith,
with new friends and new adventures,
new gifts to give and to receive

We go in faith and peace

To offer wisdom and experience,
competence and compassion in the vocations
to which we are called

We go in faith and peace

With whatever fears, whatever sadness,
whatever excitement may be ours

We go in faith and peace

As a pilgrim people always on the way
towards a promised goal

We go in faith and peace

With our faith in the pilgrim God
who leads his people through the desert
into a land of promise

We go in faith and peace

As we leave here, we acknowledge that the congregation of NNN,
which can trace its history back to *(year)*,
is disbanded.

And, this building which was dedicated as a place of worship on *(date)*,
is now released from its sacred commission.

***Always Renewing God,
continue with us to another congregation of your people
where we will continue to worship and serve you.***

We go in faith and peace

***through Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Saviour
Amen***

Hymns & songs

Australian Hymn Book & Together in Song

To God be the Glory – AHB 86, TIS 147
Now Thank We All Our God – AHB 14, TIS 106
Sing Praise & Thanksgiving – AHB 25, TIS 107
The Church's One Foundation – AHB 385, TIS 457
God has Spoken by His Prophets – AHB 92
Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah – AHB 478, TIS 569
All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord – AHB 367, TIS 442
I Will Sing the Wondrous Story – AHB 173, TIS 233
And Can It Be – AHB 138, TIS 209
Immortal, Invisible, God only wise – TIS 143
May the feet of God walk with you – TIS 779

Others Hymns and songs

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided (Tune TIS 603)
God who sets us on a journey
How Great Thou Art
His Eye is on the Sparrow
Shine Jesus Shine
Praise with Joy the World's Creator – TIS 179

Benedictions

May our God, the God of love,
bless and keep you forever,
grant you peace, perfect peace,
strength for every endeavour.
Go now and love Him with all your heart,
serving Him forever.
May our God, the God of love,
bless and keep you forever.
Amen

May the peace, love and hope of God
which passes all understanding,
made known through Jesus Christ.
in the power of the Holy Spirit,
be with you and your loved ones,
now and always.
Amen

May the road rise to meet us;
May the wind be always at our back;
May the sun shine warm upon our face,
The rain fall soft upon our fields,
And until we meet again,
May God hold us in the palm of his hand.
Amen

Be confident; hold your heads up high
God's glorious presence is with us.

Be confident; rejoice in solidarity
God's love will strengthen us.
Be confident; face the unknown future
God is present for us, in time and beyond.
Be confident; be ready to change
God has entrusted us to do God's work!
Amen

May the feet of God walk with you, and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you, and his ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you, and his breath give you life.
May the child of God grow in you, and his love journey with you - this day and evermore.
Amen

Closing of the Door or Procession

Closing congregation

And now, as we go and leave here today, we acknowledge that the congregation of XX Uniting Church, which can trace its history back to XX(year), has officially ended.

Closing of the door

The door of XX Church will be symbolically closed after the service by XX (name). The door to the building is closed but God's love and grace continue to live in this area.
OR May we remember, the door to the building may be closed, but God's love, hope and grace will continue to live in this place.

Prayer at closing

Always Renewing God, comfort us as we continue our fellowship and seek other congregations of your people where we will continue to worship where we will continue to worship and serve you.
Amen

Procession

The cross (*or other material property*) from NNN Church will process from the building to the street where it will be taken to NNN Church at (address). Next Sunday the cross will be dedicated as part of the worship in that congregation.

Release of building

This building, which was dedicated as a place of worship on XX (date), is now released from its commission at this time.

Proclamation of The Word

It is suggested that the Proclamation of the Word might identify Scriptural themes such as:

- ✚* the hope given by God to Israel through Isaiah of a new beginning
- ✚* the hope given in a dream to Joseph of the birth of a baby, and the vulnerability of such a hope
- ✚* the move to close one chapter of their life and begin a new journey like that given to Abraham (at his stage of life)
- ✚* If there is a sense of failure in the closure, speaking about Moses who ran away from Egypt after trying to liberate his people and felt an abject failure, but God did not let him stay in the secluded life of a shepherd and called him back to lead his people to the freedom only God can give.

FURTHER IDEAS & SUGGESTIONS

Message from the minister / former congregation / 'Parish' Church Council / secretary or position holder in the congregation etc

Thank you for joining us today at this special service.

It is a sad yet hopeful time for those members of the XX Uniting Church family whose background has been as part of XX Church.

Sad, because something so important in their lives for so long will be sold in the near future, and the physical connection with over XX years of worship and ministry in this place will be broken. Hopeful, because the funds from the sale of this church will be used to ... (*eg establish an exciting new ministry and mission project at XX*).

OR

Hopeful, because our God is a God of resurrection life, of hope and grace, love, compassion and forgiveness.

It is not easy when a community loses a church building that has been a part of its life for a long time. We join together today as people who have been part of this church family during its lifetime, to give thanks to God for everything that is past, and to pray that God's guiding hand will continue to lead the church, the people of God, in this area. (**OR** ... God's guiding hand will continue to lead the people in XX).

A message from the Presbytery and/or Synod

This is a special service to celebrate the great things God has done through people in this place and to give thanks to God for all the mission and ministry that has happened from this church building.

This day brings back great memories and it also acknowledges a sense of loss for those to whom this place has been a significant part of their journey. It is not unusual to experience some grief when a church building is closing. This closing service is a time to celebrate what God has done and also to remember that God is always doing something new, as it is written in Isaiah; 'Behold, I am doing a new thing'. Our God leads us on in new ways in mission and ministry, as a pilgrim people, for his name's sake.

Together with the Uniting Church across our state, we give thanks today:-

for the men and women who first established the church of Christ in this place,
for all those who have followed our Lord in the years that followed,
for all who have served God in this place,
for the services held here, the preaching of God's word, the prayers prayed, the worship of God in song, the sacraments celebrated, the outreach programs,
the seeds sown, faith that has grown and lives that have been touched from this place.

Together we pray that God's work and witness will grow in this community and each of you here today will move forward to the future God has for you.

LITURGY (1)

Prelude

God,
whose creative glory we see in the rushing wind and the swirling waters,
and whose love is revealed in the smile of a child,
will remain with us.

God,
whom we have discovered in the scriptures,
and who has discovered us,
and who comes clear to us in Jesus and in the lives of the saints,
will remain with us.

God,
whom we encounter in the worship and service of faith communities,
whose Spirit is within the pastoral caring and the justice-seeking of this church,
will remain with us.

God,
gracefully known in the hard places of our earthly life's journey,
and who laughs and celebrates joyfully with us here,
will remain with us.

God,
who will be with us as this life ends,
who is with us in time and beyond time,
will remain with us.

Invitation to Worship

People of God,
we gather today to mark the closing of our ... Congregation
and to remember with thanksgiving
the many ways in which God has blessed our ministry and our lives
in this place.

Let us lift our voices in praise and song
to the One who alone will continue to care for and sustain us
in this life and in the next.

Words of certainty from the apostle Paul

Neither death, nor life...nor things present, nor things to come...nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

We thank God for God's eternally relevant Word. Amen

Hymn

A Statement of Purpose

We are gathered today in our faith community past and present.

Litany of Thanksgiving

Leader: After the words "Loving God" the response is "We give you thanks."

Worship (at front of church)

The baptismal font, the communion table, the pulpit, this whole worship space,
enable us to thankfully remember the countless services of worship and sacraments
celebrated in this place,

and to bring to mind the ministers and lay leaders
who have led worship. (time of silent remembering)

For this worship space, Loving God,

We give you thanks.

Person in a leadership role (with hand on the front pew or chair):

These pews/chairs and the worshippers here today
are reminders of the congregations
who have gathered over the years
for the Sunday services, funerals, weddings, and other celebrations
that have taken place here. (time of silent remembering)
For worshippers over the years, Loving God,

We give you thanks.

The Administration (holding minute books)

These books remind us of those who have carried
the Secretarial and Financial Responsibility for ... Church over the years.
For faithful and diligent administration, Loving God,

We give you thanks

Sunday School Representative

The crafts and pictures, the curriculum books and CDs, the Christmas-pageant clothes
are reminders of the hundreds of students
who over the years have begun their Christian journey in this place.
For wonder-full young persons, Loving God,

We give you thanks.

Church Women leader

The ample times we have brought food
bring to mind the many happy times of eating, learning, and working together.
For a caring and giving fellowship, Loving God,

We give you thanks.

Study-group leader

The Bible reminds us of much laughter, much earnest discussion, many good friendships forged
as we met together.
For learning and for friendship around the table, Loving God,

We give you thanks.

Choir and Musicians

We are reminded of the congregation, the choir members, the organists, the pianists,
and all the other musicians
who have proclaimed their faith here in hymns and songs.
For voices in harmony, for voices united, Loving God,

We give you thanks.

Maintenance committee

We remember the many hours that dedicated men and women
have put in over the years to maintain this building.
For hard work inside and outside the church, Loving God,

We give you thanks.

Worship leader

We come together with so many good and treasured memories,
but with a strong sense of grief at saying farewell to this hallowed place.
We come together, also,
with great hope for continuing our life of faith by joining a new place of worship.
For the life of this faith community which will continue on, Loving God,

We give you thanks.

Hymn

Prayer of Approach

Eternal God,
God of the present time,
of ages past and of all the ages that are to be,
we worship you.
Loving God,
God of the compassionate act and of selfless caring,
we welcome you.
God of the church,
who brings us together to worship, to learn, and to serve,
we respond to you God,
whose will is revealed in Jesus Christ,
who proclaimed the just and sharing way,
who accepted the unaccepted,
and whose unswerving love took him to the cross,
we glorify you. **Amen.**

A Time of Remembering

During this time members of the faith community share treasured memories.

This prayer to make holy (hallow) these memories.
We offer you our memories of this ... faith community, so dear to our hearts.
We offer you the memories that we have expressed.
We offer you the memories that we keep deep within ourselves.
As you have blessed us in the listening and in the telling,
so you will bless us as we bring them to mind
and share them in the coming days.
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,
who told wonderful stories and shared his experience with his disciples. **Amen.**

Letting Go

We are all grieving from the closure of our church
and the breakup and scattering of a faith community.

A Prayer of Grieving.

It is healthy that we can express our grief concerning the closing of our church,
and there is a grief we have held tight within ourselves from sole personal experiences.
Let our grief be expressed,
so we are able to accept Christ's way of renewal and peace.
There is some deep personal grief experience that will always be associated saying farewell.
Let our grief and inaction go,
so we are ready to work with new Christian friends in a new situation.
There is a sense of reluctance to face the realities of a different faith community worship.
Let the old possibilities go,
so we are ready to grasp fresh possibilities as members of another faith community.
There is a clinging to familiar patterns of worship,
a clinging to familiar ways of serving in the community.
Let our patterns go,
so we are ready to serve with new friends in new ways.
The cooling Spirit of God's peace is among us now. **Amen.**

Words of Assurance

God hears our deepest feelings of heart and mind and spirit
and has heard us this morning.
We will continue to offer these feelings as we let go this faith community.
God will continue to listen to us.

God will go with you in your new ventures of life and faith, God is eternally to be trusted. God's peace, which passes all knowledge and understanding, will be your peace.

Bible Readings

Sermon

Hymn

Holy Communion (including The Lord's Prayer)

A Statement: The Church Closure

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

Presbytery representative: This building, dedicated and named ... Uniting Church together with the land on which it stands, and all objects remaining in it, we now commend to other purposes.
(*The Rolls are presented by the Congregation Chairman to the Presbytery representative.*)

A Prayer of Moving on in Faith

When the chosen people left the land of Egypt for the uncertainty of the wilderness, you, O God, went with them. You inspired and directed Moses and the people to the Promised Land.

You will be with us now as we move on.

When the prophets knew for certain that the old values and traditions would no longer serve your purpose, nor bring closer your realm, you, O God, showed the doubters a new way, and revealed fresh opportunities to the closed-minded.

Ever-faithful God, you will be with us as we move on.

When Jesus realized that the trusted structures and the traditional leaders could no longer serve your purpose, when Jesus knew it was time for a change, you, O God, were at the heart of his ministry, you sustained him all the way to the cross.

***We move on to fresh ways of worship,
We move on to serve in new communities of faith.***

***We move on to work with new partners
to build up the life of the United Church
and of the whole church of Jesus Christ.***

***With you, we move on to strive
for justice and peace in our local community
and throughout the world.***

***We move on to sing the familiar hymns with familiar friends,
with you we move on to sing new songs with new friends. Amen.***

Though we let go of our cherished place.

God remains with us,

Though we sing new songs and worship in new ways.

God remains with us,

Though we serve in different ways and pursue different causes.

God remains with us,

Though we find new friends in our new congregation.

God's love remains with us,

God's justice will inspire us,

God's realm will call us to action.

God is eternally for you and with you.

Thanks be to God!

Hymn

Congregation exits the church

Declaration on leave taking (on leaving of the building)

Presbytery representative: With thanks to God for the work accomplished in this place,
I declare this building be vacated.

We now declare that this day

it is no longer the place of meeting of a congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Closing the Doors and Blessing

God of Ruth the adventurer, Be with us.

God of Jesus, fearless and faithful one, Be with us.

Holy Spirit, forming and reforming faith community, Be with us.

May the feet of God walk with you and his hand hold you tight **AMEN**

LITURGY (2)

GATHERING

Call to Worship

Now the Lord said to Abram,
'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house
to the land that I will show you...
I will bless you, and make your name great.'" *Genesis 12:1-2*

Hymn

Greeting

The Lord be with you
And also with you

Introduction

*It would be appropriate to say something briefly
about the closure of the church*

We come together today to worship in the place where
Sunday after Sunday you have gathered for years to worship God
this has been the place where your faith and hope
have been nurtured by the word and sacrament
by friendship and care
Today we come to give thanks to God
for all that has been fruitful and life-giving in this place
just as we also hear God calling us to new adventures in faith

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Declaration of Forgiveness

WORD

Bible Readings

Your word O Lord is a lamp to our feet
A light to our path

In this is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God!

Proclamation

THANKSGIVING

Hymn

Time of Remembering

*Members of the church briefly share their treasured memories of the church
A photo display may be projected*

The memories might include

- ✂ a service that affected a member in a special way
- ✂ a wedding or funeral for a well-loved family member or friend

- ✚ a fun Sunday school story
- ✚ a humorous story of church life
- ✚ a wonderful church meal
- ✚ a time of serving in the local community
- ✚ a life-changing encounter with a minister or church member
- ✚ an inspirational moment in a worship service or in a Bible-study or learning group
- ✚ a musical or choir experience

Prayers of Thanksgiving

Loving God,
 We offer you our memories of this ... Church
 so dear to our hearts.
 We offer you the memories that we have heard.
 We offer you the memories that we have expressed.
 We offer you the memories that we keep deep within ourselves.
 As you have blessed us in the listening and in the telling,
 So you will bless us as we bring them to mind and share them in the coming days.
 We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,
 who told wonderful stories and shared his experience with his disciples. **Amen**

Go to each of these symbols and give thanks to God

Font

for all who were baptised in this church

We give you thanks

Communion Table

For all who were sustained through Holy Communion

We give you thanks

Lectern

for all who read the Bible and all who proclaimed your word

We give you thanks

Organ

For all who lead us in singing God's praise
 through the music of this organ

We give you thanks

Prayers of Intercession

The Lord's Prayer

SENDING

Hymn

A Prayer of Moving on in Faith (*Presbytery Representative*)

When the chosen people left the land of Egypt
 for the uncertainty of the wilderness,

You, O God, went with them.

You inspired and directed Moses and the people to the Promised Land.

You will be with us now as we move on.

When the prophets knew for certain
 that the old values and traditions would no longer serve your purpose,
 nor bring closer your realm,

**You, O God, showed the doubters a new way,
and revealed fresh opportunities to the closed-minded.
Ever-faithful God, you will be with us as we move on.**

Hymn

*During the hymn, people take their hymn books
and bibles and maybe the cross (whatever symbols they have cherished)
and take them out as they sing a sending song*

Blessing

God of Ruth the adventurer

Be with us

God of Jesus, fearless and faithful one

Be with us

Holy Spirit, forming and reforming us

Be with us

LITURGY (3)

Welcome, greeting and notices

Invitation to Worship

People of God,
we gather to celebrate the life of ... congregation
which has met here for nearly ... years
and to remember with thanksgiving
the many ways God has blessed lives
through the worship, life, teaching and service of those years.

Call to worship (Psalm 150 alt.)

Praise the Lord! Praise God in the sanctuary!
Praise God in the heavens and in the greatness of God's power.
Praise God with all the instruments of music, with singing and celebration.
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! O praise the Lord!

Opening Prayer of thanksgiving

God, we thank you
for life and for those who have lived with us here
in our journey of faith.
Today is a time of remembrance and story;
but because of our faith, it is not a time of fear or despair.

Because of who you are,
and the hope we have in you,
we can enjoy our moments of recalling and sharing.
May we know your presence with us today,
as we have done in the past.
Lead us by your Holy Spirit into our future.
In the name of Jesus our Lord we pray. **Amen.**

Song

Prayers of remembrance and confession

Loving God,
you have sustained and guided your people
through the generations.
Accept our gratitude for the faithful witness
of the generations of people
who have worshipped and served in Jesus' name
in the ... Uniting congregation.

By your grace
continue to bless those who have called ... Church
their spiritual home in recent years,
and grant that the acts of love and care
by which your people have been blessed
may continue in the communities of faith
to which they will belong in future days.
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

God of our future,
we seek the safety of what we know.
Free us to let go, to step out in faith.

God of our past,
you appear and we refuse to recognise or to know you.
**Free us from any misconceptions
so that we may see you as you really are.**

God of our present and our future,
you have promised to be with us always.
**Free us from all distractions
that could limit our understanding of your place in life
and that we may recognise you in each other
and in the world around us. Amen.**

The peace

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

(Greet those near you with a sign of peace.)

Song

Bible Readings

Your Word O Lord is a lamp to our feet,
A light to our path.

In this is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God!

Sermon

Song

Prayers of praise and thanksgiving

We give praise to the one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
in whose name we have gathered
as a congregation in this place
and who has blessed us with years
of witness and ministry
through many lives, events and teaching.
Thanks to God for all these blessings.

We give thanks for all the guidance, wisdom, love and forgiveness
that have been shared over ... years
by the generations who have worshipped
and shared their faithful life in this place of worship.
**Thanks to God whose presence has stirred hearts
and enriched lives.**

Gracious God,
we thank you for all who have worshipped here:
for baptisms, confirmations, Sunday Schools
both as students and teachers,
for funerals celebrating faithful lives,
for bible studies and faithful learning,
for worship leaders both lay and ordained,
for musicians, stewards
and all the many ways this congregation
has borne witness to your presence – we give thanks.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ we pray. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Offering

Prayers of dedication and intercession *(Presbytery Representative)*

Remarks about the past, present and future *(Presbytery Representative)*

Final litany and prayers of thanksgiving *(Presbytery Representative)*

This **worship space** has been a blessing
to all who have come here and sat in these **pews** over the years
for Sunday worship, for Church and Sunday School anniversaries,
weddings, funerals, baptisms and other occasions
celebrating God's presence amongst us.

This **Cross** has been a visible reminder of the risen Christ,
the source and inspiration of our congregation.
It has been a symbol to all who have worshipped here
of God's promise of a new life.
It reminds of the ministry to which we are called,
both here and beyond this place.

This **baptismal font** stands as a symbol of God's love for all.
Through its water and the Holy Spirit,
infants, children and adults
have become members of the church universal
and have been welcomed into this particular community of faith.
In the waters of baptism we have died and risen with Christ
and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

From this **lectern and pulpit**
the biblical story has been read and the gospel proclaimed.
From it our minds have been enlightened,
hope encouraged and our lives challenged.
Here we have heard of God's saving love and grace for all.

At this **Communion Table** we have been welcomed
and given a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.
We have united with Christ
and with one another through the sharing of his body and blood. We have been strengthened for
our mission and for our daily lives
and sent out to share Christ's love in the world.

Music has been a means of blessing for us.
With the help of skilled and faithful musicians
playing **organ, piano and other instruments**
and the words contained in **hymn books** such as these,
we have learned the faith through praising God.
The gifts of music have helped us to experience God here.

There are so many other things for which we give thanks,
so we say together:
**We come together with so many good and treasured memories,
but also with a strong sense of grief
as we say farewell to this hallowed place.
We come together also with great hope
for continuing our life of faith
within various congregations nearby.
Loving God, for the ... years of life of this congregation,
we give thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.**

Song

Benediction (*Presbytery Representative*)

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Song

(The congregation leaves the building and gathers outside at the front entrance.)

Closing of the Congregation (*Presbytery Representative*)

And now, as we go and leave here today,
we acknowledge that the congregation of ... Uniting Church,
which can trace its history back to [year], has officially ended.

Closing of the Door

*A congregation representative closes the door,
The Presbytery Representative says*

May we remember,
the door to the building may be closed,
but God's love, hope and grace will continue to live in this place.

Prayer at Closing

Always, renewing God,
comfort us as we continue our fellowship
and seek other congregations of your people
where we will continue to worship and serve you.
Amen.

Release of Building

This building,

which was dedicated as a place of worship on [date]
is now released from its commission at this time.

Afternoon tea and sharing of memories in the hall

LITURGY 4

(The closure of more than one congregation, where the former congregations are planning to work as one new congregation)

GATHERING

It would be helpful if there were 'Welcomers' at the door of the Church, from each congregation

Call to Worship

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world
whoever follows me will never walk in darkness
but will have the light of life."
Paul said, "You are the body of Christ
and individually members of it"

Hymn of praise

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

Introduction

Welcome to this service where we gather as two congregations
who have now decided to
worship and work together in the name of Christ.
Through the ages, God has moved the people of Christ
to join in worship and service
Over the next few weeks
I will be inviting people from both congregations
to tell something of their personal story
and what has sustained them in faith over the years.

It is appropriate that we celebrate this coming together today
when in our Gospel reading we hear John the Baptist
encouraging his disciples to further their growth
by pointing them to Jesus
and when they come to see Jesus what he does
is invite them into his life by saying, 'Come and See'.
As we grow together as one body
may we be enriched by the variety of gifts
God has given to us in each other

Opening Prayer

Eternal God,
you have called us to be members of one body.
Join us with those who in all times and places
have praised your name,
that with one mind and heart,
we may show the unity of your church,
and bring honour to our Saviour, Jesus Christ. ***Amen.***

Confession of Sin

At the font pour water into the font and say

You have been baptised into Christ
dying to your old life in order to be raised with Christ
to walk in newness of life.

Let us confess our sins to God.

O God,

***We confess our tendency to love the past,
flee the present, and fear the future.***

***We rest too easily in our shortcomings,
shortsightedness, and separateness.***

***We hear more readily your word of comfort
than your word of challenge.***

We fail you by our casual concern

for the unloved, the lost, the confused.

***Grant us your pardon and your strength,
as we start a new life together in this place.***

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Here is good news.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Hear then God's word of grace to us

Your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God

A doxology, hymn, or anthem may be sung.

WORD

Scripture Readings

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God!

Sermon

Hymn

Act of Covenant

Representatives of each of the congregations bring the baptismal registers and membership rolls to the Minister.

**We give you these records of the NNN and NNN congregations,
which records our life as members in the body of Christ.**

A representative from each congregation could say something about the history of their congregation and their hope for the mission of the church in this place

Covenant

I ask you now to stand and covenant together before God
and in the presence of our Presbytery Minister.

By the grace of God, we covenant together

**to be one people of God in this place:
to celebrate God's presence in Word and Sacrament,
to care for one another in love,
to nurture one another in faith,
and to share in the life and mission
of the Uniting Church in Australia
and of the whole church of Jesus Christ.**

Presbytery Minister

There is always some sadness when a church closes
and the pain of that can stay with us for some time
however, today you have made a courageous
and positive step forward
and I want to assure you
of the support and oversight of the Presbytery
as you endeavour to bear witness together
to the love of God in this place
Thanks be to God.

Renewal of Baptismal Faith

The people may be seated.

What binds us all together into one Body
is our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection
That is what gives us our unique identity and particular calling.

Joined to Christ in Baptism
We are one body and one spirit.

**Out of the water of baptism we rise to new life in Christ
*We have one hope in God's call upon us.***

Water is poured into the font

Prayer

Eternal God,
We thank you for the gift of water.
Through the waters of the sea,
You led Israel out of slavery
into the freedom of the promised land.
In the waters of Jordan Jesus was baptised by John
and anointed with your Spirit.
By the power of the Holy Spirit, bless this water
that by it we may be reminded of our baptism
and celebrate our fellowship in Christ,
to whom, with you, and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory, now and forever. ***Amen.***

Come, Lord Jesus,
Refresh the lives of all your faithful people.

*The congregation is sprinkled with water three times as the Minister says:
Always remember you are baptised and be thankful*

Doxology

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God above you heavenly host
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost**

I ask you now to pledge yourselves to Christ's ministry
in the world:

Will you continue in the community of faith,
the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread and the prayers?
With God's help, we will.

Will you proclaim by word and example
the good news of God in Christ?
With God's help, we will.

Will you seek Christ in all people,
and love your neighbour as yourself?
With God's help, we will.

Will you strive for justice and peace,
and respect the dignity of every human being?
With God's help, we will.

May the all-holy God,
who has given us new birth
by water and the Holy Spirit,
keep us steadfast in the faith,
and bring us to eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

Prayers of Intercession – *lead by the Presbytery Minister*

Lord's Prayer

SENDING

Hymn

Blessing

As you have been fed, go to feed the hungry.
As you have been set free, go to set free the imprisoned.
As you have been received – give.
As you have heard – proclaim.
And the blessing which you have received
from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
be always with you. Amen.

Song: "Send me Lord" (Thuma Mina)

L. Send me Lord
C Send me, Jesus, send me Jesus
Send me, Jesus, send me, Lord