

LITURGY FOR LEAVING A PROPERTY

GATHERING:

People gather at the front gate, then enter the property after the opening words.

We gather here today to give thanks to God for *(name of property)*, to remember what it has meant to us, and to pray for the *(name)* family who are leaving it.

Optionally:

We also remember the *(name)* family for whom this place will become their livelihood and their home.

An explanation may be given about the liturgy, its purpose and the use of different parts of the property. Other people may be named.

PRAISE:

Move to a picturesque part of the property - perhaps the top of a hill. Suggested prayers can be found in "Resources for this Liturgy" found at the end of the liturgy. A general expression of praise to the Trinity is given. Next comes praise that picks up themes of creation, particularly stewardship and provision, and God's faithfulness.

CONFESSION:

This can take place in a part of the property that has been badly abused, for example by erosion, over-grazing, salting, etc. See "Resources for this Liturgy". Explicitly name:

-things we have done to grieve (abuse) the property:

-things where the property has abused us, for example plagues, fires, floods

ABSOLUTION:

Use can be made of the Psalms or the Prophets, highlighting restoration and hope, for example, barrenness turned into fertility. "Resources for this Liturgy"

RESPONSE TO THE ABSOLUTION

The liturgist must consider carefully what symbolic action is most appropriate here. For example, if the land is heavily salted, pouring water on it is not a pastorally sensitive action. A tree could be planted, or fertilizer thrown on the ground. It is important that the response be done by the family, guided by the liturgist.

OTHER STATIONS

People can move to other parts of the property as appropriate. For example, certain paddocks, dams, etc. At these places, people are invited to "tell the stories"; their memories of favorite times and hard times.

They may choose to focus on certain objects, for example, a tractor, and to name them if relevant.

*Symbols may be used if desired, and carried away from that place.
An appropriate scripture portion may be read.
Telling of the story/stories.
A symbol may be used if desired.*

RESPONSE/INTERCESSION

*People are invited to gather at the house or homestead.
This step may lead into a meal and/or Holy Communion.
Intercession can be lead by the liturgist in whole or in part.
Opportunity for free prayer is appropriate.
Intercessions can include: remembering absent people; prayers for those acquiring the land, for wisdom and for stewardship; for those moving out, for example, going to new homes, new modes of employment.*

LORD'S PRAYER

SHARED MEAL:

A meal shared with family and fiends may be appropriate.

HOLY COMMUNION:

*Communion elements could come from the property itself.
For example grain grown in a previous season could be used to make bread, or water from a well or spring could be used for the wine.
Elements could be served out of items that express something of the farm. For example, a lunch box and thermos might be meaningful for those who have spent a lot of time on tractors in paddocks, unable to break for lunch.*

GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:

L: The Lord be with you
R: and also with you

L: Lift up your hearts
R: We lift them to the Lord

L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
R: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

L: Praise and thanksgiving are rightly yours, for you are the God who created this land and entrusted it to us.

Through the generations you empowered us to be stewards of this land for your glory.

You were in our lives as we came to this land, as our children came to this land, and as our

children's children leave this land.

You will remain as sustainer of this land long after we have left it.

And so we praise you with the faithful of every time and place, joining with choirs of angels and the whole creation of the eternal hymn:

ALL: Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

We thank you that during our time on this property, you have been faithful to us. As you supplied the needs of the Israelites in the wilderness, so you have sustained this family through prosperity and adversity.

As you loved creation enough to become part of it in Jesus Christ, we have been reminded of your presence as we cared for your creation, and we are reminded of your Spirit's presence in the gentle breeze and the howling gale- your Spirit which nurtures and comforts us.

THE NARRATIVE OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

from "Uniting in Worship", pp.102-103 UCA National Commission on Liturgy, 1988

We bless you, Lord God, king of the universe, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who, on the night of his betrayal took bread, gave you thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take this and eat it.
This is my body given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper,
he took the cup,
gave thanks,
and gave it to them, saying:
Drink from this, all of you.
This is my blood of the new covenant
poured out for you and for everyone
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, whenever you drink it,
for the remembrance of me.

With this bread and this cup
we do as our Savior commands:
we celebrate the redemption he has won for us.

Pour out the Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine,
that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

As we grieve the loss of this place
make us mindful that you are with us in all situations:
Uniting us, though separated; Comforting us, though distressed;
Empowering us in unfamiliar surroundings.
Strengthen us to serve you in your ministry of reconciliation
wherever we may find ourselves in the future.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ,
in your holy church,
all honor and glory is yours,
Father almighty,
now and forever. Amen

The bread can be broken and the elements distributed in a manner appropriate to the occasion. A prayer after communion may be offered here.

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

This should take place inside the front gate.

We have given thanks for the gift of (*name of property*), remembering the good times and the bad, and prayed with and for the (*present families*) and (*future families*).

As we prepare to leave this place, and to bid it farewell, hear the words of Scripture:
Be strong and of good courage, do not be afraid; for it is the lord who goes with you. Your God will not fail you or forsake you. Deuteronomy 31:6

An appropriate closing ceremony may be performed. The blessing follows this action.

The grace of Christ attend you;
the love of God surround you;
the holy Spirit keep you;
this day and forever. AMEN

RESOURCES FOR THIS LITURGY

PRAYER OF PRAISE

Almighty God,
you are a God of creation,
and of love,
Your everlasting rainbow,
set high in the clouds,
and your crucified Son,
who bleeds for the world,
reminds us of this re-creation and love.

Grant us eyes to see your majesty in creation,
even as we walk away from the familiar
into the unknown,
Grant us ears to hear your words of eternal comfort,
even in the painful exits.

Grant us the gift of your grace to travel the rough road
of the uncertain tomorrow.

For all days
- even the tomorrows –
have been formed by your hand
and we praise your name.
For we too want to say of all your works
“It is very good”. Amen

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION/ABSOLUTION

Where there has been a struggle O God,
you have met us with so much on this place.
Soil, dust, grass, stubble, sun, rain, stock and grain.
Yet all has not always been well here.
There have been times when we have not done our best,
or when our best did not seem to be enough.
When hard times, or hard decisions,
seemed to give us not choice.
If we had not cared for your creation here
as we should have - forgive us.
If this place has hurt and changed us,
or made us bitter,

in your mighty mercy grow in us
a willingness to still praise your name,
and seek to be your people.
O God, you have met us with so much on this place.
Friendship and family, laughter and stories shared.
Yet all has not always been well here.
There have been hard times which have weighed us down,
times where we have not loved you, or each other, as we'd want to.
If we have said or done things to wound other people
or each other - forgive us.
Help us to forgive each other,
and help us to forgive ourselves.
In the glory of your holy name. Amen

ABSOLUTION (Declaration of Forgiveness)

Jesus said, *Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* (Matthew 11:28)

I declare that, as Jesus has taken the weight of your/our sins as he carried his cross, and it carried him:

Your sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

* * * * *

Where there has been land degradation

Creator God, we stand before you today
knowing that we have not left this place
as you would have it.

We, and our forebears, even in trying to improve this land,
have caused (*name the damage, for example salinity, over-clearing, erosion, leaching etc.*)
Forgive us, God.

As we leave this place, we ask that you,
who created all things, and renew all things,
will heal us and heal this land.

We commit ourselves,
and this place,
to your power to re-create,
in your merciful love,
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

* * * * *

One or more of the following readings may be added before the Declaration of Forgiveness: Romans 8:22-25, Mark 16:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

ABSOLUTION (Declaration of Forgiveness)

The same Jesus Christ who died and was raised to new life offers us forgiveness, “for the saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Your sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Where the move spells both sadness and relief
God of goodness,
we confess that we have often failed to do the right thing,
or to be the sort of people we want to be.
You have given us so much,
yet we have fallen so far short.
Take our sins from us,
As far as the east is from the west.
Give us a fresh start,
and help us to leave our wrongs behind,
so that we may leave this place still thankful to you,
looking to a new future that you have promised us.
We ask this in the name of Christ. Amen.

ABSOLUTION (Declaration of Forgiveness)

Hear the word and the assurance of the Lord,
“as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.”
(Psalm 103: 12)
Through Christ all are born to new life.
Through Christ your/our sins are forgiven.

NOTES:

This is written by Philip Liebelt, one of the editors of “*Gentle Rain on Parched Earth*”.

1. It is not uncommon for people to have to leave their properties. This may be due to the rural recession, consolidation of properties, children leaving the land, or fix other reasons. In many instances the properties will have been owned and worked by successive generations of the one family. At such a time, a Christian liturgy that enables people to remember, to say good-bye, and to grieve the loss of their land and home seems necessary. This liturgy must also proclaim hope amidst pain, and life out of death.

2. This liturgy aims to maximize the use of symbolic action. Different parts of the service are held at different locations on the property, for example the gathering is at the

front gate; praise is on high ground; confession is at a place where the land is somehow abused; prayers of intercession are held at the house. This could be likened to a “stations of the cross”. Often certain items on a property are significant to those leaving: for example a tractor or a plow. Sometimes these objects have names. Attached to them is a story (or stories). It is the task of the liturgist to discover these places and objects and incorporate them into the liturgy. Symbols, if portable, can be taken away and brought to the new home as ways to remember the past.

3. It can be planned that the service would take place after both the sale of the property and the clearance sale. The new owners could be present. People should meet outside the front gate.

4. No music or singing is included in this liturgy. This could be added depending upon circumstances. One song that picks up the theme well is Eric Bogle’s “Leaving the Land”.

5. When the liturgy ends at the front gate of the property, it may be appropriate to move to a church afterwards.

6. Those leaving the land may be interested in producing a “time capsule” which could be left on the property. This could be buried at an appropriate part of the liturgy. Some kind of symbol could also be given to any children present for them to take away with them.

7. It may be appropriate for those present to share in a meal together. This could incorporate the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving used in this liturgy has been based upon the normative prayer in “Uniting in Worship Leaders Book” (Melbourne:JBCE 1986) The Narrative (of the Institution of the Lord’s Supper) is incorporated in this Great Prayer. By using a form based on that in “Uniting in Worship”, the participants are reminded that they are not alone in their exodus but are entering a different phase of living their life for Christ.

8. The “Blessing and Dismissal” is intended to be a final committal. People should gather inside the front gate, then at the appropriate point a symbolic action is performed. This could be done by the people walking off the property, closing the gate, and then latching it. The removal of symbols through the gate may be appropriate.

9. Many scriptural passages or images can be used in this liturgy. They must necessarily be brief and link into the particular point of the liturgy. Examples include:

Genesis 1: 28-31	Creation and stewardship
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8	Everything has its time
Psalms 63: 1-5	Our thirst for God
Psalms 107: 33-38	God’s blessing upon the land
Isaiah 35	Wilderness is recreated

Ezekiel 34: 7-16	Shepherd and sheep images
Matthew 6:25-34	Do not worry
Mark 10: 29	Hundred -fold blessing
John 7: 37-39	Living water
John 10: 1-18	Jesus the good shepherd
John 16: 16-24	Sorrow will turn to joy
Romans 8:31-39	God's love in Christ
Hebrews 1: 10-12	God does not change
Hebrews 2: 5-10	Human value and stewardship

Mention could be made of seasons - perhaps based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8-20 (There is a time for...).

10. This liturgy may be adapted to suit non-farm situations such as closure of a business, retrenchment of staff, loss of job.

* * * * *

The liturgy was written by Denis Burns, Stephen Robinson, Frank Van Der Korput and Greg Woolnough as an item of assessment in their final year at United Theological College, Sydney. It came out of a discussion at the college of the difficulty directly related to Stephen Robinson's family leaving a farm which had been in the family for nearly a hundred years. Stephen's father Charles has written a book entitled *One of these Days*, a history of his family coming to the land, settling on it, stories of farm life and its struggles and humor, and eventually leaving the land. It is essentially a family's journey of faith. For some families who leave the land and use this liturgy, encouragement to write of their journey may be a good grieving and healing process.

* * * * *

I want to affirm this liturgy because of my family's experience in losing our two family farms in 1987. My husband had been killed in a farm accident in 1984 and I knew how important the rituals and grief process were for our healing. When it came time for our farms to be sold, I decided to create a ritual for our family. I personally walked the land and took soil from different places on the two farms where happy and sad events had happened. My 16 year-old son sifted the soil together, wrote a letter about our situation and put the soil in a "cracked jar" (very symbolic for us as we were a broken family at that time). The day of the sale we (myself, my children, a grandchild, my pastor, a couple of close friends, my husband's brothers and sisters, my niece, a journalist and the Wisconsin public television crew that did the documentary) went to the courthouse and heard, watched and

saw the reality of the farms being sold. After the sale, we went to the cemetery and had prayers and buried the jar that held the soil from the two farms next to my husband's grave. Each child took turns filling in the "grave". Even the small grandchild helped.

Afterwards, we did the Norwegian-Lutheran thing and went to church and had lunch. In the afternoon, we sat around and reminisced about the farms and all the memories that they held for different family members. There were lots of tears and lots of laughter as stories were told. It was such a healing process for us. It helped us bring closure to the reality of the loss and at the same time helped us move to the next phase of our lives.

It was my goal that this documentary be shown to help non-farm people realize the tremendous loss this is for a family. I also hoped it would help other families and pastors find ways to create their own rituals for whatever situation they faced. I also know that some seminaries used the documentary in pastoral care classes.

The documentary was shown on Wisconsin public television on April 3, 1987. The documentary, titled, *Harvest of Hope*, received the national Gabriel Award from the National Catholic Association for Broadcasters and Allied Communications for the highest achievement in excellence and public service in the art of communication for the year of 1986-1987.

Thanks be to God.

Sandra Simonson Thums
P.O. Box 399
Rib Lake, WI 54470