

EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF AMERICA

PASTOR'S SERVICE MANUAL

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INTRODUCTION

*“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”
Proverbs 25:11*

Pastors are expected to be masters of the apt word. We are expected to know how to frame important spiritual moments with sacred words and forms that enhance and showcase the meaning God intended. There is often an aversion in non-liturgical churches to formal liturgy, yet when we come to the holy ceremonies of the church's life we do look for sacred vocabulary and structures that will enhance the dignity and meaning of these times. The *Pastor's Service Manual* is intended to help pastors give shape and language to the many kinds of services we're called upon to officiate.

When it comes to a wedding, baptism, groundbreaking or the many other occasions we lead, there are three things we need to know: (1) What is the protocol for this occasion? (2) Is there a particular order of service we should follow? (3) Are there special words, from Scripture or elsewhere, which are customarily used?

In free churches there is usually no particular liturgy for the various special services of the church. There is not a specific way to do a funeral, Communion or any of the other services we do. In fact, our 'way' is variety and choice. Even when we have a suggested order, pastors feel free to adapt almost any service to fit the church, the situation and their own personal preferences. Consequently, rather than one official liturgy, this manual provides options and ideas for virtually every occasion.

The loose-leaf binder and the digital downloaded format are intended to help pastors adapt, rearrange and supplement the material provided here. The print format allows you to easily see and assess the material. The digital format allows you to cut and paste, to adapt to your own circumstances and to substitute actual names for the more generic N****. You have permission to download, modify and copy material from this manual.

I am thankful for the blessing and help of the Evangelical Free Church of America Ministerial Association in this undertaking, and for the ideas and feedback from experienced pastors. I am especially indebted Aaron Uran, owner of Next Step Resources. Without his urging and production help, this manual would not have been done.

With much of this material, I have functioned as an editor, bringing the elements of previous manuals or of other pastors to this book. In other cases, I have written or adapted elements myself. The goal in all these various services is to reflect the spirit of my own denomination, the Evangelical Free Church of America, as well as many other non-liturgical churches, and to help pastors with the important work of speaking the golden, apt word.

Pastor Lee Eclov
August 1, 2011

PART I: CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP SERVICES

GENERAL WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

“Worship,” according to William Temple’s classic definition, “is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness, the nourishment of the mind with his truth, the purifying of the imagination by his beauty, the opening of the heart to his love, the surrender of the will to his purpose.” In independent, non-liturgical churches worship services vary considerably—a diversity that is part of the appeal of these congregations. But some things must be constant:

- We seek to worship God in his three persons for his character and praise him for his wonderful works.
- Our worship is grounded in the truth of Scripture and includes the words of Scripture.
- Worship engages the people of God in active participation, and is led by people of sincere and evident Christian commitment.
- Worship and praise may move through a great variety of emotions, but should never be trite or glib. It should elevate the spirit, the mind and the emotions of the believer with the things of the Triune God.
- Worship, when genuine and Spirit-filled, is a powerful evangelistic tool. Where else can the unbeliever see the vitality and love of our great God so clearly?
- Worship is a happy work of the believer’s heart, and is aided by nothing so much as prayer.

Worship services vary from church to church in orders of service, music styles, drama, media, etc., but all should be thoughtfully and prayerfully organized. Different organizing principles can be used:

- A single theme—an attribute or action of God in one of his three persons—may be the focus of a service, with most of the elements chosen around that theme. Often, the theme can be drawn from the pastor’s preaching text and will thus enhance the communication of the Word.
- General worship and praise may move from a more celebratory and joyful tone to a more introspective and prayerful conclusion.
- A service may be structured around the Communion service, with movement in song and word toward the Table, then in celebrating the meal, and finally in response.
- Traditionally, the sermon follows the rest of the worship time, however there are some exceptions: 1) In services observing the Lord’s Supper, the sermon has traditionally come before Communion to prepare God’s people by the Word. 2) Some preaching texts especially address worship themes. Therefore it might be best if the sermon is near the beginning of the service with a time of worship in response. 3) The sermon might be placed in the middle of the service, with an extended time of response afterward for prayer, singing, an invitation, etc.

Though music is often the predominant element in worship, the wide variety of tastes and repertoires in local churches make it impractical to address music in this manual. Sometimes churches forget that other elements of worship are also important. First Timothy 4:13 enjoins the public reading of Scripture, and there are many creative ways to do so. Prayers are another important element (see the suggestions to follow). Testimonies can take all forms—prepared personal accounts of God’s work, finish-the-sentence sharing (e.g., “One verse that comforts me is...”), video stories, etc. Worship can also be enhanced by the verbal arts, like drama, choral readings, monologues and poetry, and by visual arts, like banners, calligraphy, photography, paintings and the projected arts. The elements included here have long been common to many kinds of services.

Calls to Worship

A brief spoken or sung summons to the privilege of worship. It has the effect of focusing the congregation’s attention on the worship they are about to bring. While a Call to Worship can be a song, or a non-scriptural invitation, biblical statements like the following are especially fitting.

Psalm 5:3: In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

Psalm 9:9-10: The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.

Those who know your name will trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Psalm 11:4: The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD is on his heavenly throne.
He observes the sons of men;
his eyes examine them.

Psalm 62:5-8: Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;
my hope comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

Psalm 84:1-2: How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD Almighty!
My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.

Psalm 84:10-12: Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.
O LORD Almighty,
blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Psalm 96:1-6: Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Psalm 100: Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving

and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Psalm 118:22-24: The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 122:1-2: I rejoiced with those who said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD."
Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

Psalm 145:18-21: The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.
The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.
My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise his holy name
for ever and ever.

Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD.
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool."

Isaiah 6:3-4: And they were calling to one another:
"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."
At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Isaiah 40:31: ... those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Micah 6:8: He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

John 4:23-24: Jesus said, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Hebrews 4:14-16: Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us

then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Prayers¹

The best guide and source for prayers is Scripture. Beyond that, there are many books of eloquent and meaningful prayers, most notable perhaps being *The Book of Common Prayer*. The public prayers in non-liturgical churches are customarily extemporaneous but the following ideas will help in shaping those prayers. However, written prayers are opportunities to capture in measured and skilled language the cries of the individual heart, as well as the petitions of an entire church.

Invocation – A short prayer near the beginning of the service asking God to work in the hearts of the worshippers during that service. Traditionally, this has a five part structure: (1) an address to God, (2) a relative clause referring to some characteristic of God, (3) a petition regarding God’s work in that service, (4) a result clause, and (5) a concluding doxology. An example would be:

Lord God, you who always make your environment holy, we ask you fill our service with a holy awe and joy this morning, that we might know for certain we have been in the presence of Jehovah, in the name of Jesus, who lives to bring God to us, Amen.

Prayer of Worship – A prayer that focuses strictly on the attributes or actions of God. It works well to focus on one truth about God, in one of his three persons, and meditate on some of its dimensions. For example, this prayer focuses on Jesus as Servant, and draws from several texts:

Lord Jesus, this morning we worship you because you are the Servant of the Lord. Unlike us, who by nature seek to lord it over others, you took the very nature of a servant when you took on flesh and became obedient unto death. You showed such humility when you washed your disciples’ feet, and you still show a servant’s humility when you forgive our sins and answer our prayers. But even more than serving us, you serve the Father, by being a covenant for the peoples and a light for the nations. Because you have served the Father and us so selflessly, we exalt you. Amen.

Prayer of Confession – The emphasis in contemporary services on praise has obscured the ancient tradition of taking time in worship for confession of sin. One model is the simple prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” A time of silent prayer, allowing personal confession, is common, but biblical prayers are appropriate as well. Following are two biblical examples and one classical liturgical confession:

Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12: Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge....
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Daniel 9:4-7, 8-10, 17, 19:

O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

¹ Several ideas in this section are from C. John Weborg’s article, “Prayer,” in *Leadership Handbook of Preaching and Worship*, James D. Berkley, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), p.159.

Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame... because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.

Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.

*The Book of Common Prayer:*²

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

Words of Assurance – Following a time of confession scriptural assurance of God’s forgiveness and grace should be offered. These are not prayers, obviously, but are offered in connection with prayers. Many verses affirming God’s forgiveness are appropriate. These are some examples:

Psalm 103:8-14: The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

Psalm 32:1-2, 6-7: Blessed is he
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man
whose sin the LORD does not count against him
and in whose spirit is no deceit....
Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you
while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters rise,
they will not reach him.
You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

²*The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), p.6.

Passing the Peace – This custom, which is uncommon in the free churches, finds its historical roots in Scripture’s “holy kiss.” The congregation stands, the pastor extends his arms toward them saying, “The peace of the Lord be with you.” The congregation responds in unison, “And also with you.” The pastor may then invite the people to greet one another, “Let us greet one another with the peace of the Lord,” followed by a time of greetings.

Pastoral Prayer – This wide-ranging prayer focuses on the work and needs of the Body. It does not need to be brought by the pastor, but it should reflect the heart and oversight of a shepherd. When no thought is given to the prayer it quickly becomes clichéd and predictable. The prayer should be rooted in biblical priorities—the advancement of the kingdom and the revival of the church. Remember with specificity the ministries and missionaries of the church (perhaps a different one each week). In praying for the sick and sorrowing, pray not only for their health but also for the shaping of character and for faithful endurance.

To emphasize the sense of care for the congregation, the pastor might come down from the platform and stand at the front or even in the aisles. For variety...

- Bring a request and then allow people to pray for that concern in silence
- Ask church leaders to prepare this prayer, or have several people pray various short elements of one prayer.
- Take several requests from the congregation before praying.
- Invite short prayers from the congregation, if they can be heard by all.

The Lord’s Prayer – While there are many biblical prayers that can be used in a service, this is by far the most common. While this prayer may not be a traditional part of the service, it is a valuable asset in our worship, and one with which most people are familiar. This prayer is often attached at the end of another prayer, the pastoral prayer, for example. It is commonly recited from the Matthew 6:9-13 in the King James Version, although the tongue-twisting use of “trespasses” and “those who trespass against us” is frequently replaced by ‘debts’ and ‘debtors’ (drawn from Luke 11:2-4, KJV). The prayer, added at the end of another prayer, is introduced by, “We pray this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray, ‘Our Father...’” (at which point the congregation will join in spontaneously in praying with the pastor).

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses [debts], as we forgive those who trespass against us [our debtors]. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Since this is the Lord’s pattern for our prayers, our pastoral prayers may follow this outline, beginning with God’s name, then moving to his Kingdom and will, and on to his provision of daily bread, forgiveness and protection.

Biblical Doxologies

Churches often rely on their songs to express the glory of God, but Scripture offers powerful ‘words of glory’ (which is what doxology means). These doxologies fit naturally in various places in a service—at the conclusion of a prayer, introducing or concluding singing, or at the end of a service instead of a benediction. These brief expressions reaffirm basic biblical theology.

Luke 2:14: “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Romans 11:33-36: Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21: 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.

Philippians 4:20: To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:17: Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 6:15-16: God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

2 Timothy 4:18: The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:11: In all things may God be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 5:10-11: And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen

Jude 24-25: To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Revelation 1:5-8: To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.
So shall it be! Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Revelation 5:13: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

Revelation 7:12: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Offertory Sentences

To be read just before or after the offering to remind the church of the scriptural stewardship expectations.

Deuteronomy 16:17: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.

1 Chronicles 29:10-14: "Praise be to you, O LORD,
God of our father Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.
Wealth and honor come from you;

you are the ruler of all things.
In your hands are strength and power
to exalt and give strength to all.
Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name.
“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”

Psalms 24:1-2: The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the waters.

Psalms 96:8: Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come into his courts.

Proverbs 3:9-10: Honor the LORD with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;
then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Malachi 3:10-12: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

Matthew 2:11: On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Matthew 6:19-21: Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 10:8: Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give.”

Mark 4:24: Jesus said, “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

Mark 8:36: Jesus said, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

Luke 12:15: Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Luke 16:13: Jesus said, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

Acts 20:35: Remember the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Romans 12:1: I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

1 Corinthians 16:2: On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

2 Corinthians 8:9: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:12: For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7: Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:8: And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:10-11: Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Philippians 4:18-19: The gifts you sent... are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Affirmations of Faith

Despite their strong commitment to evangelical orthodoxy, many non-liturgical free churches seldom verbalize their doctrinal commitments in a public service. But statements of faith, whether taken directly from Scripture or from well-established creeds, focus worship on our most precious biblical truths, and help instruct the people of God. Some biblical affirmations of faith are as follows:

We believe:

...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time. (*1 Corinthians 15:3-6*)

We believe that Christ is Lord:

“...who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” (*Romans 1:3-4*)

We believe:

“...in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” (*Romans 4:24-5:2*)

We believe:

“...Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (*Romans 8:34*)

We confess our allegiance to Christ Jesus:

“Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death--
even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11)

We confess belief in Jesus Christ our Lord:
“He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16)

Historic Creeds & Statements of Faith

Creeds read as part of a worship service give the congregation opportunity to publicly affirm their faith as well as reinforcing right doctrine. In the case of longer creeds or the denomination’s Statement of Faith, a certain portion may be read in a service, highlighting a particular doctrinal focus for that day. Creeds and Statements of Faith are easily found on the internet. In addition to the two below, other classic doctrinal statements are Irenaeus’s Rule of Faith, the Chalcedonian Creed, Athanasian Creed, Heidelberg Catechism (the most ecumenical of Reformed catechisms and confessions), the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrance (written in 1978 to affirm verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible); and the Evangelical Free Church Statement of Faith (www.efca.org/about-efca/statement-faith).

The Apostles Creed (3rd-4th century A.D.)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hades; the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic³ Church; the communion of the saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed (Written in 325 A.D. and revised in 381 especially to articulate the nature of Christ.)

I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And one holy catholic⁴ and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Benedictions

Bestowing a benediction is a great pastoral privilege. By faith, it is much more than a good wish, but rather a divine blessing granted to God’s people. It is not so much a prayer as a promise made more certain by its being said. During a benediction the pastor should look at his people, and they at him. Many pastors hold one or both hands toward the people (arms high and extended, palms down) as a symbol of a blessing given. It is very useful to memorize the benedictions used most often to allow freedom of expression.

³ catholic means the church universal. The word ‘Christian’ can be used instead..

Numbers 6:24-26: The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

Psalms 120:1-2, 4-5:

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress;
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

May he send you help from the sanctuary
and grant you support from Zion.

May he remember all your sacrifices
and accept your burnt offerings.

May he give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.

We will shout for joy when you are victorious
and will lift up our banners in the name of our God.

May the Lord grant all your requests.

Acts 20:32: Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Romans 15:13: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 16:23: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

2 Corinthians 13:14: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Ephesians 6:23-24: Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

Philippians 4:7: And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:23: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:23: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Hebrews 13:20-21: May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Jude 24-25: To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Revelation 22:21: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

Baptism celebrates the believer's entrance into Christ's church. This manual focuses on "believer's baptism" single immersion. (Guidelines for a service of infant baptism can be found in other service manuals.⁴) Believer's baptism reenacts the Christian's conversion. Our death in Christ is symbolized by going under the water, and our resurrection in him by coming up from the water. The water also reminds us of the cleansing we receive in Christ and symbolizes that spiritual baptism by which we become part of the church, Christ's Body. Baptism is the Bible's "public profession of faith" and for that reason is usually accompanied by some verbal testimony or affirmation of faith. It often provides an anchor of assurance to those who wrestle with uncertainty about their salvation.

Baptismal services vary, as do the preparations of baptismal candidates. Churches having baptisteries can incorporate baptisms into regular services if they wish, while those churches using a lake, river, pool, or the baptistery of another church usually build an entire service around the baptisms (which they may not be able to hold as frequently).

While it is customary for the pastor to perform baptisms, there is no biblical reason that other mature and respected believers cannot baptize. This would be a matter of local church policy. Baptism should not be conducted independent of a local church since, among other things, it symbolizes being baptized by the Spirit into one Body, the church (*1 Corinthians 12:13*).

Depending on the customs of the local congregation, children who have made a clear and credible profession of faith and who are old enough to grasp the symbolism of this ordinance may be baptized. Many pastors do not suggest this step to children until they are about 12 years old but sometimes younger children eagerly desire to be baptized. In conference with parents, determine not only if the child has a clear salvation experience but also if he/she can grasp the symbol and significance of baptism as a public profession of faith. If so, and the parents are comfortable with the step, proceed with joy.

Some churches provide white baptismal robes for the candidates, but in their absence, instruct the candidates to dress modestly (swimming suit and T-shirt, for example). When baptizing, the pastor stands to the side of the candidate. The candidate grasps one wrist with the other hand, and with the free hand plugs their nose. The pastor holds the candidate's wrist with one hand, and puts his other on their back, then lowers the candidate into the water and raises them back up. If there is limited space, the candidate must bend their knees. The buoyancy of the candidate makes lifting the person back up easy. It is good to have an attendant waiting as the newly baptized person comes out of the water.

At the very minimum, a baptism should include these elements:

- A clear affirmation of the candidate's faith in Christ
- The baptism, with words of declaration.

The following elements are often woven into a baptismal service:

Scriptural Words of Institution

Our Lord Jesus instituted water baptism prior to his ascension when he commanded, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (*Matthew 28:19-20*).

Sermon or Meditation

A sermon focuses on the Christian's new birth, on Christ's death and resurrection, cleansing from sin, etc. If there is no sermon offer a brief statement on the meaning of baptism and the reason for its practice. There may be unbelievers present, especially guests of the candidates, for whom this is a wonderful evangelistic opportunity.

Scripture

Matthew 3:13-17 - The baptism of Jesus

Matthew 28:18-20 - The Great Commission

Mark 8:34-35 - "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross..."

Acts 2:36-41 - Baptism on the Day of Pentecost

Acts 8:26-38 - Philip baptizes the Ethiopian

Acts 9:17-19 - Peter baptizes Cornelius and his household

Acts 16:29-34 - Paul baptizes the Philippian jailer

⁴ Paul Engle, *Baker's Worship Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), pp.155-168.

Romans 6:1-7 - Baptized into Christ's death
Romans 10:9-10 - "Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord..."
1 Corinthians 12:13 - "We were all baptized by one Spirit..."
Galatians 3:26-28 - "All... baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ..."
Colossians 2:9-12 - "Having been buried with him in baptism..."
1 Peter 3:20b-22 - The symbolism of Noah and the ark

Prayer

Usually this is an extemporaneous prayer, recognizing biblical truths about baptism and thanking God for the candidates and the salvation they are celebrating through this step of obedience. The following is a model:

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ. We are grateful that by his death and resurrection he redeemed us from our sin. We know that it is by your grace alone that you have cleansed us and granted us eternal life in your family. We rejoice that we have been baptized by your Holy Spirit into one Body.

We thank you for the one / for these who now desires to receive the sign and seal of water baptism in obedience to the command of your Son our Savior. Strengthen N****'s faith now that N**** might continue to walk before you in holiness and righteousness all *his/her* days. This we pray in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Confession of Faith

Option 1:

The candidate gives personal testimony of faith. People nervous about public speaking sometimes forget things they intended to say. Encourage the candidate to write out their testimony or at least the key points. Should a testimony not be a clear evangelical affirmation, the pastor can simply question the person once they finish, "Are you trusting Christ as your personal Savior?" Or the pastor can explain that the candidate has clearly professed Christ to him and then ask the candidate, "N****, have you repented of your sin, put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and are you determined to follow him as your Lord?" To which the candidate replies, "Yes." The pastor or an elder should hear these testimonies in advance of the service to be sure the person has a clear grasp of salvation. Another option is to show a prerecorded video clip of the person telling of their salvation. This alleviates the problem with stage fright and allows a better control of time in the service.

Option 2:

Our Lord said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (*Matthew 10:32*). I now ask you to confess your faith publicly by answering "I do" to the following questions:

- Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, and in the Holy Spirit as co-equal and co-eternal members of the Trinity?
- Do you believe Christ died for your sins and arose from the dead to give you everlasting life?
- Do you confess that your only hope for salvation from sin and eternal punishment is found in your personal trust in Jesus Christ alone?
- Do you affirm your intention to live for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit?

(Questions can be shortened or simplified, especially if the candidates are younger.)

Option 3:

Pastor: Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all desires for that world, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?

Answer: I renounce them all; and, by God's help, will endeavor not to follow, nor be led by them.⁵

Baptism

The pastor steps to the side of the candidate and says: N****, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Or :

⁵ Adapted from *The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), p.277.

N****, having heard your confession of faith in Jesus Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

A prayer for the candidates (either individually or together) is in order, just before or after the baptism, seeking God's rich blessing for the candidate(s) and a deep assurance of faith in Christ. A Christian friend or family member dear to the candidate or a church leader may offer such a prayer if the pastor does not. Examples of more formal prayers are:

Our Redeeming God, we thank you for your grace that saved each of these brothers and sisters, each unique in their story, yet indebted all alike to Jesus Christ. We ask that this step of obedience will serve to strengthen their faith and assurance of their salvation. We pray, too, that this public step will give them confidence in sharing their faith, and that you will use it even to witness to the unseen powers of your grace. Enrich the fellowship of these *brothers and sisters* in the church and enhance their personal ministries. May they be increasingly conformed to the image of your Son who has cleansed them and raised them to newness of life. In Christ's name, Amen.

Or...

O merciful God, grant that as Christ died and rose again, so this your servant may die to sin and rise to newness of life. Grant that all sinful affections may die in *him/her*, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in *him/her*. Grant that *he/she* may have power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world and the flesh. Amen.⁶

OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

- ✓ A candidate may recite or read a favorite Bible verse or passage as part of the testimony.
- ✓ Before baptizing, the pastor might speak personally of some quality in the candidate's spiritual life that is exemplary or encouraging. Others in the congregation might be invited to do the same, so long as there will be somewhat equal treatment of all the candidates.
- ✓ The congregation might sing the candidate's favorite song as he/she comes out of the water.
- ✓ The person who brought the candidate to Christ might be invited to perform or assist in the baptism. A parent might be invited to assist with the baptism of their children or teens.
- ✓ Baptismal Certificates that can serve as a record of the event are available at Christian bookstores. Photographs or video of the baptism can be provided as a keepsake.
- ✓ Provide print or online invitations to the baptism that the candidates can send to friends and family members. Often unchurched people take such invitations seriously. (It might be wise to indicate that no gifts are necessary.)
- ✓ In baptizing someone who cannot physically be immersed, pour or sprinkle water over his/her head. The mode should not be a hindrance to their desire to be baptized.
- ✓ Special bulletin covers for this occasion can be purchased or designed.

⁶ Adapted, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal), (New York, Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 278.

COMMUNION

Communion is such a rich symbol for the Christian! It harkens back to that distant night in Egypt when the angel of death ‘passed over’ the homes whose doors were marked by the blood of a lamb. It directly commemorates Jesus’ Last Supper, when he established the new covenant in his body and blood. And it is a foretaste of the heavenly feast, “the wedding supper of the Lamb,” when Jesus shall dine with his disciples again, as he promised. Our frequent observances of this ordinance should, over time, bring out its rich colors in meaning, sometimes somber and deeply reflective, and other times joyful and anticipatory. Always respect the very personal way God works through this meal in the hearts of believers, often in ways too deep to explain or express.

Within our tradition, Communion can be observed in a variety of ways. Frequency typically ranges from once a month to once a quarter. Most often, the congregation is served the elements in their seats, but other options are not unusual. In many churches, servers are elders or deacons, however they may simply be men and women of godly reputation. Those who serve unseen in the church, like the members of a committee or the youth sponsors, might serve. “These people are always serving our church,” the pastor can say, “but today you will see them as they serve us.”

Whether or not children who have accepted Christ partake of Communion is usually left to the parents’ discretion, although in some churches children are asked to refrain from partaking until they have completed a catechism or Bible Instruction Class, or reached a certain age. While the pastor usually presides, there is no biblical reason why another respected leader may not do so.

Traditionally, Communion follows the sermon as a response to the Word. Scripture, however, does not demand this practice, and other pastors prefer to have Communion precede the message in the service. Sometimes pastors leave their regular preaching series on Communion Sundays in order to bring a message tailored to this observance. To allow more time for the Lord’s Supper the message may be shorter than usual.

Communion, as simple as it is, has several different important connotations: remembering Christ’s work, spiritual nourishment, fellowship with the Lord and his people, and our anticipated reunion with Christ and the wedding supper of the Lamb. This ordinance is also referred to as ‘breaking of bread,’ and ‘the Eucharist’ (meaning ‘thanksgiving’). In any case, the Communion segment of the service may use these elements.

Song of preparation

A hymn, praise song, or special number sets the tone for Communion and, if necessary, allows the servers to take their places. Servers often process in from the rear of the auditorium and take their places in a front row or gathered before the table.

Introduction to Communion

A reminder of the purpose of the Lord’s Supper and an invitation to believers (and *only* believers) to participate whether they are from the congregation or visiting. A devotional thought may be shared at this point if the sermon has not been directly related to Communion. The texts which describe the establishment of this Supper are Matthew 26:20-30; Luke 22:14-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 (cf. also 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Beyond these, consider the scores of texts dealing with salvation through Christ Jesus. A few examples are:

Exodus 12:12-13, 21-24, 28-29 with *John 1:29* – Moses’ instructions about the Passover with John’s identification of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”
Isaiah 53 – “We all, like sheep, have gone astray... and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
Isaiah 55 – “Come, all you who are thirsty...”
Jeremiah 31:31-34 – The New Covenant
John 3:14-17 – “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...”
Romans 3:21-25a – “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...”
Hebrews 4:14-16 – Jesus, our High Priest
Hebrews 12:18-29 – Since we come “to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant” let us “worship God acceptably”

Words of Warning

Traditionally, the congregation is warned against taking this meal “in an unworthy manner,” however the pastor must be careful not to imply that people must therefore come without fault. This is, after all, a meal celebrating forgiveness and life for sinners. Paul’s intention was to guard against drunken sacrilege and overt discrimination against some in the church. Nonetheless, this is a solemn and holy observance, and this biblical warning is warranted.

Удалено:

1 Corinthians 11:27-29: Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Self-examination and Confession of Sin and Need

This may take the form of silent prayer, someone praying aloud on the congregation's behalf, or a congregational prayer. You might use, or draw from, the following texts:

Psalm 32:3-5: When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"--
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Psalm 51:1-12: Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Words of Assurance of Forgiveness

Psalm 78:38-39: Yet he was merciful;
he forgave their iniquities
and did not destroy them.
Time after time he restrained his anger
and did not stir up his full wrath.
He remembered that they were but flesh,
a passing breeze that does not return.

Psalm 103:8-14: The LORD is compassionate and gracious,

slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Confession of Faith *(optional)*

A biblical affirmation or an historic creed may be read at this time (see General Worship Resources).

Consecration of the Elements.

This prayer, usually by the pastor or one of the servers, recognizes the work of Christ as symbolized in the elements, gives thanks, and asks for hearts sensitive to God's Spirit during this time. Often a prayer is offered before each of the elements. Here are three optional prayers:

- Father, we are thankful for the bread and cup. We pray that these elements will provide more than physical nourishment. Grant us the peace, unity and spiritual nourishment this bread symbolizes. May this cup speak again of the blood Christ shed for the forgiveness of sin. Cleanse us and consecrate us again as we partake of this meal together. We eagerly await the day we shall eat it with you in the Kingdom of Heaven. In Christ's name, Amen.
- Our heavenly Father, in your great mercy you gave your only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our redemption. So we draw near in sincere humility to celebrate this memorial of his suffering and death. We earnestly ask you to make this bread and cup holy by your Word and Spirit so that in this fellowship with you our spirits may be refreshed through Jesus Christ our Lord. In his name, Amen.
- *Extemporaneous prayer:*
 - Thank God for the work of Christ through his death and resurrection.
 - Dedicate the elements to the Lord, asking him to speak to each heart in the course of the Communion.
 - Recognize the purposes of the elements

Serving and Partaking of the Elements

During the distribution of the elements, there may be silence or quiet instrumental music, singing, a solo or ensemble, Scripture reading, or testimonies. When the people have been served, the servers will return the remaining elements to the pastor at the table. The pastor will then serve the servers, after which one of them will serve the pastor(s). When all are ready to partake of the bread the pastor may hold the element in the sight of all and say:

"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me'" (*1 Corinthians 11:23-24*).⁷

When all are ready to partake of the cup the pastor may hold the element in the sight of all and say:

"In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this

⁷ The phrase, "which is *broken* for you," is from the KJV, and not found in modern translations.

bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (*1 Corinthians 11:25-26*).

Thanksgiving

Communion may be concluded by prayer, song, and/or a special benevolent offering. You may wish to use one of more of the following Scriptures:

Micah 7:18-19 – "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression..."

Romans 5:1-2 – "Justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Romans 8:31-39 – "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Hebrews 10:19-25 – "Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus..."

1 John 3:1-3 – "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"

Revelation 5:9-13 – "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy...'"

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ These prayers are from *The Book of Common Prayer*.⁸

For use at the beginning of Communion, or before a time of personal examination:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A prayer of solemn confession:

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word, and deed, Against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, And are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, Forgive us all that is past; And grant that we may ever hereafter Serve and please thee In newness of life, To the honor and glory of thy Name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- ✓ Another common tradition is to invite the congregation to file forward, row by row, to receive Communion from the servers, who may say to each one, "This is Christ's body, broken for you," and "This is Christ's blood, shed for you." The pastor should explain that people may come forward in their own time, or refrain from coming at all. After most have been served, someone should carry the elements through the auditorium to serve those for whom standing and walking is difficult.
- ✓ Elements can be placed on several tables around the auditorium, with an attendant at each table. During an extended period of reflection, members of congregation go to one of the tables where they may be served by the attendant, serve themselves, or serve one another.
- ✓ Invite families to come forward together to receive the elements. The head of the household may be designated to serve. Those without families present might come as groups of close friends.
- ✓ Gather around tables in the Fellowship Hall, a tray of bread, a pitcher of grape juice and small cups on each table. Use a more informal structure for the time of fellowship and reflection.
- ✓ Communion looks forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb as surely as it looks back to the cross. Rather than somber reflection, the service should occasionally be joyful and anticipatory. Speak in the metaphors of the great feast and the wedding supper of the Lamb. You might set the table as a banquet table with silver, china, candles, flowers, etc.
- ✓ Incorporate Communion into an observance of a Passover meal. The Christian observance of the Passover (either with the full meal or just with the symbolic elements) is exceptionally rich in salvation symbolism and heightens our understanding of the Lord's Supper. Messianic Jewish believers are often called upon to lead such a service, or to provide written guidelines.

⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), pp. 67, 75.

- ✓ Communion for shut-ins: Small, portable Communion sets are available from Christian retailers, allowing the pastor to share the Lord's Supper in homes or hospitals. Because Communion is meant to be celebrated by the Body of Christ, perhaps one or two other believers can join you and the shut-in.
- ✓ A healing service might be incorporated into the Communion time. One way is to have people come forward to receive the elements. Then those who would like prayer for healing of heart, relationships or body bring a slip of paper with their request to prayer teams stationed near the front of the church. No discussion or explanation is necessary; just a short prayer for them, offered in faith. Even those not seeking healing for some specific concern might delight to have a moment of personal prayer for their lives. Those not seeking prayer return to their seats after being served.

CONCERT OF PRAYER

The shaping of a prayer meeting into a Concert of Prayer began with Jonathan Edwards and other prayer leaders of the mid-eighteenth century. The word ‘concert’ does not apply to music but to harmony (as in a ‘concerted’ effort). A Concert of Prayer differs from a regular prayer meeting in that it is not focused particularly on personal concerns and it is called for the whole church, or even a group of churches. In broad strokes, Concerts of Prayer traditionally focus on two great prayer goals: the revival of the church, and the advancement or fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

The format for a Concert of Prayer is flexible. What follows is just one basic format. A Concert of Prayer may be focused on one area of interest, (e.g., missions, a pressing community or national concern, or outreach efforts). Then these elements would be adapted to fit that situation. Careful preparation is *essential*. Make sure participants are thoroughly prepared, songs and musicians ready, time thought through, and handouts or visual aids clear. Typically, a Concert is one to two hours long.

Worship

- Songs of praise and worship
- Introduction – explain the purpose and direction; specific instructions for prayer. Ask people to stand and form a threesome (triplet). Two triplets form a ‘huddle,’ which will be used occasionally throughout the time.
- Songs of praise and worship (1 or 2)
- Praise
 - Scripture (e.g., Psalm 66:1-9; Psalm 150)
 - Prayers of praise in huddles of six
 - Song to conclude

Vision for united prayer

This may take the form of a short (10-15 minute) sermon calling for united prayer, or a simple summary of the idea and benefits of corporate prayer. It could simply be reading of Scripture with brief remarks. Possible texts:

- 1 Kings 8:41-43; (2 Chronicles 6:32-33)* – Solomon praying that the Temple would be a place where foreigners might find their prayers answered
- 2 Chronicles 14-16; 20; 30:1-9; 34-35* – The stories of several revivals in Israel’s history
- Psalm 80* – A plea for restoration, that God would again “make your face shine upon us”
- Psalm 85* – “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?”
- Psalm 126* – The joy of being restored
- Isaiah 56:1-7* – A promised house of prayer for all nations
- Ezekiel 37:1-14* – The valley of dry bones and the breath of God
- Zechariah 8:18-23* – People of every nation clinging to those who have the Lord’s presence
- Matthew 21:12-13* – Jesus’ anger at the abuse of “the house of prayer”

Seeking clean hearts in order to ask God’s favor

- Scripture of repentance (e.g., Psalm 51, Daniel 9:1-11, 15-19)
- Prayers of repentance, first in triplets, then in silence
- Song to conclude

Seeking the fullness of Christ in his church (Revival)

- Scripture of fullness (e.g., Ephesians 1:18-23; 1 Kings 8:54-60). See other texts on revival above.
- Prayers for revival of the church
 - By leaders from microphones. One issue per person, decided by the local leader.
 - Huddles
 - Song to conclude

Seeking the fulfillment of God’s purposes (Advancement of the Kingdom)

- Scripture of fulfillment (e.g., Ephesians 1:9-10; Psalm 67)
- Prayers for advancement of the Kingdom
 - By leaders from microphones. One issue per person, decided by the local leader (perhaps only 30-60 seconds)

- Huddles
- Song to conclude

Benediction

- Pray blessing over each other in triplets, (two pray for the one for one minute, then at the signal from the leader, move to the next, etc.)
- Closing song (e.g., “The Lord’s Prayer” or a song of benediction or doxology)

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ At the conclusion, ask for feedback from the congregation: What has God been saying to me/us in this prayer time? Pay special attention to repeated impressions.
- ✓ Give clear instructions at the beginning that prayers are to be brief, generally on one subject at a time, so that each one can pray. Leaders who pray should likewise be brief and focused.
- ✓ Some Scripture can be formed into a responsive reading, or a dramatic reading, to increase participation, and to help people ‘hear’ more clearly.
- ✓ Slides of songs, main themes, and Scripture readings enhance participation.
- ✓ See also “A Solemn Assembly”

A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

The Solemn Assembly has its roots in Scripture and was first practiced in this country by the Puritans. It is similar to a Concert of Prayer in that it is not focused on personal concerns and is a prayer service to which the entire church is called. It differs in that its purpose is specifically on humbling ourselves before God, acknowledging sin and seeking a fresh anointing of the Lord.

This service requires careful preparation, first in calling of the congregation to pray, for people are not likely to come unless they have been able to see why this time is so significant. They must understand the serious nature of this meeting. It would be fitting to precede it with a time of corporate fasting.

In this service, there are many short opportunities for individual participation, which require advance notice and thought. The more people involved, the better. The tone of such a service is sober and thoughtful. The following is but one way of conducting such a service.

Call to Solemn Assembly⁹

- Songs of revival and challenge
- Scripture (read by different people)
 - *Joel 1:14; 2:12-18* – “Call a sacred assembly...”
 - *Matthew 18:19-20* – The power of two or three agreeing in prayer
- Explanation of the service:

Although God through his Word has called believers to live and minister in complete reliance upon his resurrection power, it is a constant temptation for us to rely on human strength, wisdom and resources. We forget the supernatural enabling that Christ, the Head of the church, desires to give to our decision-making, influence on others, and efforts to please him. And when we forget, we slip toward sin and foolish self-sufficiency. In addition, it is possible that some of us approach our work of Christian ministry and witness as if it were a means of gaining God’s approval, rather than a result of already being accepted through faith.

Therefore, we call all Christians to join in a solemn assembly for visible unity and extraordinary prayer to reaffirm our dependence upon God and to ask him to visit us with a spiritual awakening.

Call to thank God for his grace

- Scripture
 - *1 Timothy 1:12-17* – The mercy of God to Paul
 - *Romans 4:3-8* – God’s mercy to the one “who does not work but trusts God”
- Songs celebrating God’s grace
- Prayers of thanks (in huddles of six)
- Songs celebrating God’s grace

Call to renounce confidence in the flesh

- Scripture
 - *Philippians 3:3-11* – We “put no confidence in the flesh”
 - *2 Corinthians 3:4-6; 4:7* – Christ “has made us competent”
- Prepared prayers of renunciation (written by the pray-ers, or drawn from the writings of others; see below)
- Private, personal prayer (kneeling optional; do not rush this time)

Call to Seek God’s Guidance and Power

- Prayer for Witness
Scripture: *Acts 4:23-31* – The church’s prayer for boldness
- Prayer for Government
Scripture: *1 Timothy 2:1-8* – Paul urging prayer for those in authority
- Prayer for the Church
Scripture: *Hebrews 10:19-25* – “Let us draw near to God...”
- Prayer for Spiritual Maturing
Scripture: *Philippians 1:9-11* – Prayer for discernment
- Time of open prayer
- Closing song of God’s grace

⁹ Jerry Foote

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

✓ **Other “Calls”**

Call to Confession and Repentance

- Scripture: *2 Chronicles 29:1-11; 30:6-10* – Hezekiah purifies the Temple
- Prayers of confession for our nation, churches, and ourselves

Call to Sacrifice

- Scripture: *2 Chronicles 29:20-24* – Hezekiah’s sacrifices; *Malachi 3:1-4; 4:5-6* – Acceptable sacrifices
- Presentations of sacrifices to God in small group prayer
- Song of dedication

Call to Celebration

- Scripture: *Hebrews 13:15-16* – Offering God the sacrifice of praise; *Psalms 66:1-8* – “Come and see what God has done”
- Songs of praise

✓ **Written prayers renouncing the flesh:**

“Lord Jesus, I believe that you are able and willing to deliver me from all the care and unrest and bondage of my Christian life. I believe that you died to set me free, not only in the future, but now and here. I believe you are stronger than sin, and that you can keep me, even me, in my extreme of weakness, from falling into its snares or yielding obedience to its commands. And, Lord, I am going to trust you to keep me. I have tried keeping myself, and have failed, and failed most grievously. I am absolutely helpless. So now I will trust you. I give myself to you. I keep no reserves. Body, soul, and spirit, I present myself to you as a piece of clay, to be fashioned into anything your love and your wisdom shall choose. And now I *am* yours. I believe you do accept that which I present to you; I believe that this poor, weak, foolish heart has been taken possession of by you, and that you have even at this very moment begun to work in me to will and to do of your good pleasure. I trust you *utterly*, and I trust you *now*.” Amen.¹⁰

“Dear Father, Thank you for delivering me from life in Adam and placing me in Christ Jesus. I confess that I have been a self-er and a total failure in and of myself. I have been struggling to live the Christian life out of my own resources. I admit that I have been trying to get my needs met through people, achievements, and possessions. I now give up on myself and do hereby commit my life unconditionally into your hands. I surrender all my rights and expectations, and give you permission to make me into the kind of person you want me to be.

I believe your Word that I have been crucified with Christ, am dead to sin, buried and have been raised with Him into newness of life. I claim resurrection life as my life. I have been raised into the heavenly places and believe that I now am seated at the right hand of the Father.

I choose as an act of my will to claim Christ as my life, my power, and my identity. I thank you that my identification with Christ makes me totally acceptable, and that all my need is met by Christ Jesus. I yield myself totally to the indwelling Christ for obedience. Do with me whatever you choose. Glorify and manifest your Son in my life. In his identity, Amen.¹¹

- ✓ There are scores of other texts that may be used—throughout the prophets, the stern words of Jesus, the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, among others.
- ✓ Communion might conclude such a service.
- ✓ A sermon based on a revival-oriented text (there are several in 2 Chronicles) would be appropriate, delivered very early in the service, and not too long. Remember that the point is to pray.
- ✓ If you have two morning services, the first could be announced as a Solemn Assembly, while the second follows the usual pattern. All other adult activities during those hours would be cancelled. Since visitors generally come to the later service, they would not be caught unprepared for such a solemn service.

¹⁰ Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1952), p. 54 (language modernized).

¹¹ From Exchanged Life Ministries, 1988.

- ✓ Such a service is especially appropriate at a time of national crisis, before an election, or in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer, the first Thursday in May.
- ✓ A number of books of prayers provide thoughtful and timeless written prayers, often on particular subjects that fit well in such a service as this.

HOLIDAYS OF THE CHURCH YEAR

Non-liturgical churches typically give little attention to the traditional church year, apart from the major holy days of Christmas, Good Friday and Easter. We favor preaching series over following the lectionary. (The lectionary is a prescribed list of Scripture texts—lections—for the entire year, tied to the traditional church calendar.) Nevertheless, it is helpful to have some acquaintance with these important traditions. We can learn from them and incorporate them, at least sometimes, in our own worship. Furthermore, it is useful to be conversant in these things when we deal with people from other traditions.

Advent

- Celebrates the coming of Christ. In a manner of speaking, Christ actually has three “advents”: 1) the incarnation—his birth into the world; 2) salvation—his coming into the heart of each saved person; and 3) his coming in glory. (The second, salvation, may not be regarded by some in the same way as the first and second comings of Christ to the world in history.)
- The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the traditional church year
- The four Sundays preceding Christmas, beginning with the Sunday closest to November 30
- Called *The Season of Expectation*
- Traditional color, royal blue or purple, used in banners or vestments, for example.
- The Advent Wreath, a circle of four colored candles with a fifth white candle in the middle, one candle for each Sunday, plus the fifth for Christmas Day (or Christmas Eve). There are different meanings attached to the candles, and new meanings can be assigned. It is customary to select a few appropriate verses and carols in conjunction with the lighting of each candle. Often a different family or small group of friends from the church is chosen to light the candle each week. Four options for each week are given here:
 - **Week 1:** Purple candle
 - The Hope of His Coming
 - The Prophets’ Candle
 - Hopeful Preparation
 - Hope
 - **Week 2:** Purple candle
 - The Prophecy of His Coming
 - The Bethlehem Candle
 - Joyful Expectation
 - Peace
 - **Week 3:** Purple Candle
 - The Preparation of His Coming
 - The Shepherds’ Candle
 - Sharing Joyful News
 - Joy
 - **Week 4:** Pink Candle (pink symbolizes hope)
 - The Annunciation of His Coming
 - The Angels’ Candle
 - Praising God for the Good News
 - Love
 - **Christmas Eve (or Christmas Day):** White candle (white symbolizes purity)
 - The Birth of Christ
 - The Christ Candle

Christmas Season and Epiphany

- Traditionally, this season extends from the Sunday after Christmas to the Sunday before Lent, with each of the Sundays assigned a different emphasis from the life of Christ.
- Celebrates the life of Christ, emphasizing such key truths as the signs of his Messiahship, the Sermon on the Mount, his dealings with sinners, and his healings, culminating in the Transfiguration, the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

- Epiphany celebrates the visit of the Magi to Christ and is always January 6, the day after “the 12 days of Christmas.” (Various eastern orthodox denominations celebrate this day as “Christmas” rather than December 25.) The second Sunday after Christmas is regarded as the Sunday of Epiphany.
- Called *The Season of Revelation*
- Traditional colors: White or green, depending on the Sunday’s emphasis

Lent

- A time of preparation for Easter during which believers symbolically separate themselves from the world and worldly habits in order to more fully submit themselves to Christ. Above all, it is a time to consider Christ’s atonement and shape our lives accordingly.
- Begins with Ash Wednesday, seven Wednesdays before Easter, and includes the six Sundays preceding Easter, culminating in Holy Week. Named after the practice of putting a smudge of ash on the forehead as a sign of mortality and penitence.

The Ash Wednesday service, which can be held at different times of the day, is a somber service reflecting on our mortality and sin, and our utter dependence on Christ’s saving grace. Traditionally, people file forward to the pastor, who applies a smudge of ashes (a mix of fine, black ash with olive oil), and says, “Remember, from dust you came and to dust you will return.” This service tends to be formed around strong liturgical elements—longer Scripture readings, written prayers and responses, and periods of silence. Communion is an optional element.

- In the third and fourth centuries, Lent was given to preparation for baptism, including praying for new converts. Baptisms were typically held on Easter. It was also a time where those temporarily excommunicated from the church did public penance in order to be restored.
- Traditionally, this has been a season where Christians give up something as a symbol of separation and a small step in mortifying the flesh. In more recent years a more positive emphasis has been on *taking on* some good discipline or service.
- Called *The Season of Penitence*
- Traditional color: Purple

Holy Week or Passion Week – *The Season of Passion*

- Palm Sunday, the last of the Lenten Sundays, celebrating Christ’s Triumphal Entry. In some traditions, the emphasis is on Jesus’ suffering or “The Way to the Cross.” Though not a traditional emphasis, this is also a wonderful time to celebrate Christ’s Second Coming, which the Triumphal Entry foreshadowed.
- Maundy Thursday derives its name from the Latin, *mandatum*, or ‘command’, referring to Jesus’ “new commandment,” after he washed the disciples’ feet, that his disciples love one another as he had loved them. A service on this evening recalls the events surrounding Jesus’ last evening with his disciples—the Last Supper, the washing of their feet, the agony of Gethsemane, and the betrayal by Judas. Of course, Jesus was celebrating the Passover with his disciples, so that is also part of the meaning of the evening.
 - Christians gathering on this evening celebrate Communion.
 - Some observe a full or partial Passover meal, with the Christ-centered meanings of the symbols made clear, and the Communion elements incorporated.
 - A time of footwashing reminds believers in a vivid and powerful way of Christ’s “new commandment” of loving service.
 - A Tenebrae Service, meaning a service of darkness or shadows, has been practiced by the church since medieval times. It begins with the auditorium illumined by seven candles on a table, similar to an Advent Wreath. A simple pattern is followed: a passage of Scripture recounting one portion of Jesus’ passion is read, a song of response is sung, one candle is extinguished, and finally a period of silence (perhaps two minutes or so). This happens seven times, with the story moving toward the burial of Christ. When the last candle is extinguished (or carried out), the auditorium should be completely darkened and there is a loud noise—the *strepitus*—(a drum, perhaps, or a heavy hammer on wood), to symbolize Christ’s death or perhaps, the tombstone rolling into place. The congregation leaves in silence, awaiting the joy of Easter morning. Communion is optional. This service may also be done on Good Friday. (Complete services can be found on the internet.)
 - Traditional colors: black or red

- **Good Friday** commemorates the day Christ died. It would appear our Lord died just after 3:00 p.m., having just uttered the cry of dereliction, and completed his work on the cross.
 - Though it is no longer common in our secular culture, it has long been traditional to have a three hour service, from noon to 3 p.m. A traditional theme is the seven last words of Christ (see below). Now an evening Good Friday service is more common.
 - If there has not been a Maundy Thursday Communion service, the Lord's Supper may be served on Good Friday, though that is not particularly in keeping with the crucifixion emphasis. A meditation on the death of Christ would be appropriate. Other options would be testimonies of the saving grace of Jesus, and/or dramatic renderings of the crucifixion story coupled with music.
 - Traditional colors: Black or red.
- **Holy Saturday** is not traditionally a time for a service, but rather for a vigil, perhaps with fasting. It is a quiet day, marked by anticipation. (In our day, some churches use this day for outreach-oriented Easter concerts, literature drops or community service.)

The Traditional Seven Last Words of Christ (King James Version)

1. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." *Luke 23:32-38*
2. "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." *Luke 23:39-43*
3. "Woman, behold your son! Behold, your mother!" *John 19:17-27*
4. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" *Matthew 27:45-46*
5. "I thirst." *John 19:28-29*
6. "It is finished." *John 19:30*
7. "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" *Luke 23:46*

Easter Season

- Easter is the pinnacle of Christian celebration. Christ's resurrection leads to our worship of a glorified and reigning Lord and to each believer's personal hope of everlasting life with Christ himself. Coupled with the truth of the cross, it gives us confidence that the power of sin, the Law, and Satan has been broken, and that the Lamb will indeed "open the seals" and bring all things under his authority.
- Commencing with Easter Sunday, Eastertide extends for eight Sundays, the seventh being Ascension Sunday and the eighth being Pentecost Sunday. (Ascension Day actually always falls on a Thursday, 40 days after Easter - Acts 1:4.) Traditionally, the Sundays following Easter focus on the continuing ministries of the risen Lord.
- Some churches begin this Easter Sunday with a sunrise service, remembering that the resurrection was discovered by Jesus' followers "very early in the morning." If the weather is conducive this is held outdoors at dawn.
- Ascension Sunday gives opportunity for worshipping Christ as our King and High Priest, seated in glory with the Father.
- Called *The Season of Celebration*
- Traditional colors: White or gold

Pentecost

Pentecost was the ancient Jewish Feast of Weeks, a thanksgiving festival for the wheat harvest (Ex. 34:22). For the Christian, Pentecost Sunday is seven weeks after Easter and is a day to celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell his people and his church (Acts 2).

- The *season* of Pentecost extends all the way from the Pentecost Sunday to Christ the King Sunday, which is the last Sunday before Advent, about half the year. In general, this is a time when the lectionary calls attention to matters of Christian growth and the life of the church. Pentecost Sunday is also known as Whit Sunday (White Sunday), a reference to the white robes of baptismal candidates (traditionally, Pentecost was another opportunity, besides Easter, for baptisms).
- Trinity Sunday, celebrating God in his three persons, is the first Sunday after Pentecost.
- Called *The Season of Growth*
- Traditional colors: Green, except for Pentecost Sunday itself, which is red, and Trinity Sunday, which is white.

Reformation Sunday

- In an effort to stir debate, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle Church Door on October 31, 1517. The door was a kind of bulletin board for the university. He also sent copies of his propositions to a few bishops and some friends, receiving little response at first. In time, this event became the spark that ignited the Protestant Reformation.
- The last Sunday of October marks this occasion.
- This Sunday is observed to remember not only Luther himself as a man of evangelical convictions, but his reforming ideas of faith alone, grace alone and Scripture alone. Luther's majestic hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," is often sung on this Sunday.

All Saints' Day

- In the early centuries of the church, a day to commemorate martyrs moved to a couple of different dates. In 835 A.D. Pope Gregory IV established November 1 as the day not only to remember the martyrs but "all saints".
- The Sunday following November 1 may be used to thank God for his people, making special note of those who have suffered for their faith. Other emphases might be the priesthood of all believers, great Christians of the past (or your particular church's past), remembering those from the congregation who have died in the past year, or celebrating the gifts and ministries of ordinary people in your church.
- Only very recently the *second* Sunday of November has been set aside as an "International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church." These two special occasions might be combined.
- The tradition of Halloween is a corruption of All Saints' Eve (All Hallows Eve). The ghoulish traditions of that night trace back to the occultic practices of the Celtic Druids.

DATES OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Year	Lent Begins	Easter	Pentecost	Advent Begins
2012	February 22	April 8	May 27	December 2
2013	February 13	March 31	May 19	December 1
2014	March 5	April 20	June 8	November 30
2015	February 18	April 5	May 24	November 29
2016	February 10	March 27	May 15	November 27
2017	March 1	April 16	June 4	December 3
2018	February 14	April 1	May 20	December 2
2019	March 6	April 21	June 9	December 1
2020	February 26	April 12	May 31	November 29
2021	February 17	April 4	May 23	November 28
2022	March 2	April 17	June 5	November 27
2023	February 22	April 9	May 28	December 3
2024	February 14	March 31	May 19	December 1
2025	March 5	April 20	June 8	November 30
2026	February 18	March 28	May 24	November 29
2027	February 10	March 28	May 16	November 28
2028	March 1	April 16	June 4	December 3
2029	February 14	April 1	May 20	December 2
2030	March 6	April 21	June 9	December 1
2031	February 26	April 13	June 1	November 30
2032	February 11	March 28	May 16	November 28
2033	March 2	April 17	June 5	November 27
2034	February 22	April 9	May 28	December 3
2035	February 7	March 25	May 13	December 2
2036	February 27	April 13	June 1	November 30
2037	February 18	April 5	May 24	November 29
2038	March 10	April 25	June 13	November 28
2039	February 23	April 10	May 29	November 27
2040	February 15	April 1	May 20	December 2

PART II: SPECIAL SERVICES FOR CHRISTIAN SERVANTS

A SERVICE OF ORDINATION

A service of ordination is recognition by a local church of the calling and gifts of their pastor or a missionary from their congregation. Typically the ordination process begins with the candidate writing a detailed personal doctrinal statement. Then an ordination council of pastors and lay leaders carefully examines the candidate's doctrine. When the church, council and denomination have examined the candidate's theology and references, an ordination service can be scheduled. This solemn, once-in-a-lifetime service signifies a setting apart, a consecration to vocational ministry (usually fulltime), in the church of Jesus Christ. Each denomination or local church establishes the particular process of ordination.

The date for such a service should not be set until the individual has been confirmed by the ordination council and denomination, a process which also includes affirmation by the pastor's local church. That affirmation should come by a formal vote of the governing board or congregation. Set the date far enough in advance so that desired guests can plan to attend.

Generally the ordinand gives significant input to planning this service and the following are simply guidelines. Having the ordination as all or part of the church's morning worship allows the congregation to be involved. On the other hand, having the service at another time, say a Sunday afternoon or evening, allows guests and participants from other churches to attend. An ordination is primarily a service of worship focused on the recognition of God's gifts and calling of this person for the gospel ministry. Use songs that are favorites of the candidate.

Welcome and Invocation

Words of Greeting and Introduction:

Read any special greetings received by the church or the ordinand and the introduction of special guests, fellow pastors or missionaries, and family members.

The Ordinand's Testimony:

This may be printed in the worship bulletin rather than spoken.

Scripture

Selected by the ordinand and relevant to his testimony and ministry. If he doesn't have a favorite text, one of these may be used.

Exodus 29:43-46 - The consecration of Aaron and his sons

Exodus 33:12-17 - God's presence promised to Moses

Joshua 1:1-9 - The commissioning of Joshua

2 Kings 2:8-14 - Elijah passing the mantle to Elisha

Isaiah 6:1-8 - Isaiah's encounter with the holy God

Isaiah 61:1-3 - The 'call' of Christ; cf. *Luke 4:16-21*

Jeremiah 1:4-8 - Jeremiah's call

Luke 5:1-11 - "From now on you will catch men."

Ephesians 4:7-16 - The role of spiritual leaders in equipping the church

Colossians 1:24-2:5 - Paul's description of his ministry

1 Thessalonians 2:6-12 - The demeanor of the apostles among the church

2 Timothy 1:6-14 - "Fan into flame the gift of God"

2 Timothy 4:1-8 - "Preach the Word..."

1 Peter 5:2-4 - "Be shepherds of God's flock under your care"

Confirmation of the Ordinand's Gifts and Calling:

A brief summary, usually by the chairman of the local church, identifying the gifts and character that the church has seen in this person, and affirming the call to the ministry.

The Ordination Sermon

The ordinand usually chooses the person who will deliver this sermon, which is directed to the person being ordained. An additional brief charge could be brought by another person, perhaps emphasizing a different aspect of the ministry or Christian life (e.g., pastoral care, family responsibilities, personal growth).

The Ritual of Ordination: “The Laying On of Hands”

This is usually led by a senior clergy, denominational leader, or church chair. At this time, others are called forward to participate in the laying on of hands: pastors, missionaries, elders/leaders of the local church, spouse, parents of the ordinand (if they are believers), other key participants in the service. (Those participating should be clearly informed before the service.) The ordinand kneels or is seated as the others gather round and lay hands upon him. All or some of the following statements and prayers may be shared among the participants. (A kneeling bench or pillow will make extended kneeling more comfortable for the ordinand.)

- As representatives of this church, of your colleagues in the ministry, and of this denomination, in recognition of the impelling call of God upon your life to the pastoral office and in harmony with (local church name) which has confirmed your gifts and calling as a pastor, we hereby ordain you to the gospel ministry in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- Take authority and assume responsibility to preach the gospel, “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). *(This is especially appropriate if the ordinand is a preaching pastor.)*
- Take authority and assume responsibility to shepherd the flock of God: “Shepherd God’s flock that is under your care, serving as an overseer—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Peter 5:2-4).
- Your task, along with the other servants of the church, is to “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Ordination Prayer:

This dedicatory prayer may be offered by one person (perhaps the senior clergy or someone designated by the ordinand), or may be several short prayers by those laying on hands. If several people pray, they may each focus on one specific aspect of the ordinand’s personal life or ministry. At the conclusion of the prayer, the ordinand stands and the participants return to their seats.

Presentation of the Ordination Certificate

This certificate is customarily provided by the denomination or the local church, after the documents from the ordination council have been reviewed and approved. It typically requires the signatures of some of those participating in the service.

Response by the Ordinand

These are brief, prepared remarks responding to the charge and ordination and thanking those who have participated.

Benediction:

Traditionally this is the privilege of the ordinand. (See other benedictions in “General Worship Service Resources”.)

“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (Hebrews 13:20-21)

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ **Affirmations of the Congregation**

The presiding leader shall address the congregation and ask of them the following questions. These questions may be in the bulletin or on a slide so the congregation has opportunity to consider what they are saying.

I remind you of Hebrews 13:17, which says, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you." In keeping with your intentions, answer the following questions, "We do."

Do you, the people of C**** Church, affirm that you have seen in ordinand's name the character, gifts and calling necessary for a pastor of Christ's church? *We do.*

Do you promise to be submissive to this leader insofar as he is true to God's Word in teaching and character, and as he works in union with your other leaders? *We do.*

Do you promise to encourage him in this difficult work through your prayers and help, and to respond to the Word of God as he brings it to you, knowing that nothing so encourages the heart of a pastor as people who are growing in Christ? *We do.*

✓ **Affirmations of the Ordinand**

Do you believe in your heart that you are truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the pastoral ministry? *Yes, I do.*

Do you believe that the Holy Scriptures are God's inerrant Word and your daily guidebook for equipping this flock? *Yes, I do.*

Do you recognize the special burden of responsibility you carry for this church, knowing, according to James, you shall be judged more strictly, and according to Hebrews, that you keep watch on this flock as one who must give an account of your work? *Yes, I do.*

Will you guard your life and doctrine closely, with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us? Will you be unashamed to testify publicly of Christ our Savior? And will you do your best to present yourself to God as a workman who correctly handles the Word of truth? *Yes, with God's help, I will.*

Will you pray consistently and thoroughly for your flock and for the work of God in this church? *Yes, with God's help, I will.*

Will you care for your own family, loving your wife as Christ loves the church, and shepherding your own children in the Lord? *Yes, with God's help, I will.*

Will you be an agent of God's grace to your people, loving them personally, and seeking to walk among them humbly and authentically for Christ's sake? *Yes, with God's help, I will.*

- ✓ The ordinand may wish to pray as part of his response, expressing his gratitude to God for his call, recognizing his personal inadequacy and dependence on the Lord.
- ✓ It is the custom in some churches to give a Bible to the ordinand to mark this once-in-a-lifetime occasion. It should be suitably inscribed from the church.
- ✓ Brief prepared testimonies from a few people might recognize ways God has worked through this man in their lives.
- ✓ A reception in honor of the ordinand customarily follows the service.
- ✓ It is possible for a church to ordain a person without the involvement of a denomination but remember that from that day forward, the ordaining church is responsible for that pastor's credentials and oversight, no matter where he may serve. If he should fail in his responsibilities, it is that church's duty to consider whether or not he may retain his credential. This should be clearly expressed in writing to the ordinand and kept in the church's files.
- ✓ Use the following responsive reading, if the ordinand's principle ministry is preaching. Emphasize the italicized words.

PREACH THE WORD!

Leader: The commission given to Jesus in Isaiah is given to all who preach the Gospel:
The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

Congregation: To preach good news to the poor.

Leader: To *preach* good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to *proclaim* freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,

Congregation: To *proclaim* the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn.

Leader: The Apostle Paul said,
Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified:

Congregation: We preach Christ crucified

Leader: *We preach Christ crucified:* a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Congregation: In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, we give you this charge: Preach the Word!

Leader: Preach the Word!

Congregation: *Preach the Word;* be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.

Ordinand: Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

Congregation: Yes! Woe unto you if you do not preach the gospel!

Ordinand: If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

Congregation: So *preach* good news to the poor.
Proclaim freedom for the captives.
Proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.
Preach the Word!

INSTALLATION OF A PASTOR

The installation of a new pastor marks the official beginning of a new ministry. It need not be held on the first Sunday of his service, but should be scheduled within the first few weeks.

The purpose of this service is to reaffirm God's leading in the placement process, to express congregational and pastoral dedication to the call of God and to ministry, and to introduce the new pastoral staff member to the community. If people from other churches are to come, the service should not be scheduled for Sunday morning. On the other hand, fewer of the congregation will attend if the service is at another time. It is customary to invite denominational representative, community pastors (especially evangelical pastors) and even civic leaders, especially when installing a senior pastor. If there is a local ministerium, the chairman should be particularly invited to make a few welcoming remarks. The new pastor may also want to suggest special people he would like invited.

The installation of a new pastor, especially a senior pastor, is probably bringing to an end a long and challenging passage in a church's life. Therefore, it should be a service marked with great celebration and thanksgiving, as well as solemn re-commitments to the work of the church by both pastor and people. It is also a 'get-acquainted' service to welcome the pastor's family.

Often, an entire service is given over to an installation, but it can also be part of a regular morning service, drawing on some of these elements. As to music, use songs which are favorites of the new pastor and family.

Welcome

Call to Worship

The following Psalms celebrate the way God answers the prayers of the needy or guards the steps of his people. They can be read by the leader, adapted to a congregational reading, or shaped into an invocation.

Psalm 34:1-10

Psalm 66:1-10

Psalm 75:1-7

Psalm 81:1-7

Psalm 84

Psalm 92:1-5

Psalm 95:1-7

Psalm 117

Psalm 121

Psalm 125:1-2

Psalm 134

Song celebrating God's goodness and provision

Introductions

Introduce honored guests and read greetings sent by those who could not attend. Guests may be invited to bring greetings but guard the time carefully. It would be particularly appropriate to have a word of welcome from a pastor representing the local ministerium.

Brief biographical sketch of the pastor, emphasizing his conversion, call and previous service.

Song

Perhaps a favorite song expressing the pastor's Christian testimony.

Brief summary of the search process

Brought by the Search Committee Chair or Church Chair. A formal statement/response such as the following may be used, though it is not necessarily expected:

I hereby certify that name has been called to position under the guidance of God through the prayerful deliberations of our church fellowship as prescribed in our church constitution.

The pastor stands and responds:

I hereby accept this call because I know it is the call of God for me and my family; and I dedicate myself to faithfully carry out the position of _____ of C**** Church with the Lord's help and your prayerful support.

Prayer of thanksgiving for God's provision (*Extemporaneous, by a church leader*)

- Recognize God's love for his church, especially this church
- Thank God for some of the specific ways his hand was seen in this process
- Thank God for this new pastor, and especially the ways he is uniquely suited to care for this flock.

Scripture

Generally, this is the text for the speaker's Charge to the Pastor. For other choices see the texts in the chapter, "Ordination of a Pastor."

Charge to the Pastor

The new pastor should select the person bringing the charge. This is usually a shorter sermon of perhaps 20-25 minutes which challenges the pastor to the duties the Lord and the church are giving him

Song of consecration (*optional*)

Charge to the congregation

This may be by representative denominational leader, a respected leader of the church, a visiting pastor, or, in the case of the installation of an associate staff member, someone who has special interest and responsibility for the associate's particular sphere of responsibility. This is usually a brief exhortation of perhaps 10 minutes addressing the congregation's responsibility to this pastor.

Prayer of installation

Key leaders and guests, by previous arrangement, are invited to the platform, as are the pastor and spouse. The pastoral couple kneels or is seated while the others gather about them and lay hands on them. One prayer may be offered by a designated person, or several may pray, perhaps each with a specific area to pray for. (Be sure a microphone is passed so the prayers can be heard.) Prayers might cover the pastor's personal spiritual growth, the demands of leadership and handling the Word of God, and family life. (A kneeling bench or thick pillow will make extended kneeling more comfortable.)

Response of the Pastor

Thank the participants, especially the person who brought the charge to the pastor. Explain how you have seen God's hand in this process and why you are excited to be taking up this ministry.

Closing prayer & benediction

This benediction is especially significant in that it is the first 'official' blessing of this congregation by their new pastor. See a selection of benedictions in the "General Worship Resources" section.

A reception in the pastor's honor usually follows the Installation.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ See "Other Suggestions" in the section on "Ordination" for affirmations by both congregation and pastor, for further Scripture passages, and other ideas.
- ✓ A letter from the pastor's previous ministry commending him to the new church might be sought and read.
- ✓ Some token representing the pastor's task might be presented: a basin and towel, a shepherd's staff, a Bible, etc.
- ✓ Sentence prayers for the pastor might be offered from the congregation.
- ✓ At a lighter point in the service, or later at the reception, someone can tell the pastor "Some Things You Need to Know" about the church or the community. These could be both humorous and serious.

- ✓ This prayer for the preacher, from “Morning Prayer” by James Weldon Johnson, is drawn from the early African-American tradition:

And now, O Lord, this man of God,
Who breaks the bread of life this morning,
Shadow him in the hollow of thy hand,
And keep him out of the gunshot of the devil.
Take him, Lord—this morning—
Wash him with hyssop inside and out,
Hang him up and drain him dry of sin.
Pin his ear to the wisdom post,
And make his words sledge hammers of truth
Beating on the iron heart of sin.

Lord God this morning—
Put his eye to the telescope of eternity
And let him look upon the paper walls of time.
Lord, turpentine his imagination.
Put perpetual motion in his arms.
Fill him full of the dynamite of thy power.
Anoint him all over with the oil of thy salvation,
And set his tongue on fire.

Amen ¹²

¹² An excerpt from “Morning Prayer” by James Weldon Johnson, in *God’s Trombones*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 14.

COMMISSIONING OF A MISSIONARY

Commissioning a missionary or missionary family is akin to the ordination of a pastor. It is a once-in-a-lifetime service, setting apart this person or family to missionary service. The service is usually held at their home church or main supporting church shortly before they leave for their assignment.

Typically, the service is held at a time other than Sunday morning, though a Sunday morning service is fine if all the invited guests can come, and if a large part of the service can be dedicated to this purpose. Beyond the congregation, letters of invitation should be sent to close friends and family of the missionaries, other supporting churches (especially if they are within driving distance), and denominational and mission agency representatives.

Check with the mission agency backing the missionary family to see if they have specific guidelines for a commissioning service. Because these services have a tendency to become lengthy, each participant should be as brief as possible. Consider using songs that are especially important to those being commissioned.

Welcome

Recognize any special guests and read any greetings sent especially for the occasion.

Invocation

Song

Scripture

Use texts that are especially important to those involved. These great missions texts are also suitable.

Genesis 12:1-5 – God’s covenant with Abraham

Psalms 67 – “May your salvation be known among all nations”

Psalms 87 – The nations acknowledge the LORD

Psalms 115 – God’s sovereignty over the nations

Isaiah 11:10-12; 49:19-23; 55:1-13; 60:1-5 – God draws all nations to Christ

Zachariah 8:20-23 – “Many peoples... will yet come”

Matthew 28:18-20 – The Great Commission

Mark 4:26-29 – The parable of the growing seed

Acts 1:8 – “You will be my witnesses...”

Acts 13:1-3, 44-52 – Response of Gentiles to the gospel

Romans 10 – “How shall they hear without someone preaching to them?”

Revelation 5:9-10 – “You purchased men for God from every tribe...”

Revelation 15:3-4 – The Song of the Lamb: “All nations will come and worship before you.”

Song

Testimony of Salvation and Call by the Candidate(s)

This should be less than five minutes in length.

Message

This should be a missionary challenge to the congregation as well as the missionary brought by the pastor, fellow missionary, or a leader from the sending missions organization. This message should be less than 30 minutes in length.

Charge to the Candidates

The candidate(s) sitting in the front row should now be called to the pulpit for this very brief charge. It is customary for the pastor of the sending church to give this charge.

Charge to the Supporting Church

This brief challenge emphasizes the responsibility of the church or organization to support, pray for, and communicate with the candidate. If the message above is especially addressed to the congregation, this charge can be omitted.

Commissioning Prayer

Key people should be selected to come to the platform for this prayer. Typically this would include the Missions Committee and other key church leaders, as well as denominational and mission agency representatives,

and other visiting missionaries, pastors or family members. The children of the missionaries can be included if they are old enough. Three or four persons, including the pastor, should lead in prayer around the missionary, perhaps each with a specific area to pray for. (Be sure a microphone is passed so the prayers can be heard.) Prayers might cover the missionary's personal spiritual growth, the particular demands of the work they will do, and family life. If the missionaries kneel provide a kneeling bench or thick pillow.

Presentation of Certificate

The sending denomination or agency may have a formal certificate to be presented. If not, the church might prepare one commemorating this occasion.

Song

Closing Prayer

A reception in the missionaries' honor should follow.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Special bulletin covers can be purchased or designed for this occasion.
- ✓ Prepare a special bulletin insert with one side highlighting the missionary family and their ministry and the other side giving prayer requests once they reach the field. This insert can be kept by the congregation as a prayer reminder.
- ✓ While not having the same weight as this service, it is certainly appropriate to have a re-commissioning service if the missionary is returning to the field, or taking up a new assignment.
- ✓ A short video presentation on the field or work the missionary is approaching would help the congregation better visualize and relate to the work.
- ✓ A small token or gift that commemorates this occasion would be a delightful surprise, such as a calligraphied Bible verse, an important book, etc. (something that packs easily).
- ✓ Record the service as a keepsake.
- ✓ When recruiting speakers for various charges, assign them "exactly four minutes" (for example), and invite them to prepare and rehearse carefully to maximize meaningfulness to the missionary and congregation.

INSTALLATION OF LAY LEADERS

Part of the rhythm of the church year is the election, affirmation and/or appointments of church leaders. It is appropriate to take time in a morning worship service to recognize, charge and pray for these people, as well as re-commissioning those who continue in their service. You will want to clearly define who you are including in this service, (e.g., all elders, all elected leaders, all who serve on governing committees, etc.). You do not want to embarrass someone by not making it clear whether or not they are included.

At the appointed time in the service, invite the leaders to come to the platform (or to stand where they are). If possible, introduce each one, telling what office he or she holds.

Essentially, you want to charge the leaders with their biblical responsibilities, ask the congregation to affirm their support, and pray for them. Following are some options:

Scripture

Exodus 18:12-27 – Jethro suggests Moses delegate responsibility

Mark 10:35-45 – The disciples argue about greatness

John 13:1-17 – Jesus washes the disciples' feet

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 – “Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord”

Philippians 2:1-5 – Serving the interests of others

1 Timothy 3:1-13 – General requirements of elders and deacons

2 Timothy 1:13-14 – “Guard the deposit entrusted to you”

2 Timothy 2:20-21 – Be clean vessels for noble purposes

Titus 1:5-9 – General requirements of elders

1 Peter 5:1-4 – Elders: “be shepherds of God’s flock”

Option 1:

Charge to Leaders:

Read *Mark 10:42-45* and *Philippians 2:1-5*.

Will you be faithful in the discharge of the responsibility entrusted to you? Will you pray for God’s depending wisdom and will in making decisions for this church? Will you seek to promote the Kingdom of God, setting aside personal interests and ambitions, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Will you serve this congregation in humility and love, not seeking to be served but to serve others as Christ’s servant? Will you pray for this church often? If so, say, “I will.”

Charge to the Congregation:

Read *Hebrews 13:17*

Will you uphold these leaders in your prayers, that they may have the heart and mind of Christ in their leadership? Will you submit to their authority as those chosen by God to oversee the spiritual welfare of this local body of believers of which you have voluntarily chosen to be a part? Will you encourage these leaders by your support and participation in the ministries of this church? As you have opportunity, will you express your thanks and appreciation to them for their sacrificial service on your behalf in the name of Christ? If so, say, “We will.”¹³

Prayer of Dedication:

Lord of the church, who of your servants has ever felt—or been—qualified for the assignments you give, except by your grace and power? These leaders are no different. We pray, first, that they may be people of good and godly character, that the privileges of authority and the trust of this congregation will never be misused. We pray they will not grow weary in well-doing, even when meetings are many and long and the labor seems thankless. We pray they might remember that in their foot-washing service of their fellow disciples, no one is greater than our Master. Help them to trust you for the strength, wisdom and skill they will need, toiling with all your energy which so powerfully works in them through the Holy Spirit. May the beauty of Jesus be seen in them. In his name, Amen.

Extemporaneous prayer of dedication:

- Thank God for these willing servants

¹³ Paul Renovitch

- Recognize the difficulty of the task, not only because it is hard work but because, as Kingdom work, it is opposed by the Enemy and resisted by our old, self-seeking nature
- Pray for godly character, especially when service collides with self-interest and pride
- Pray for wisdom, strength and skill both to protect the church and to move this congregation forward in the work of the Kingdom.

Option #2:

Congregational Charge to Our Leaders

Congregation: We have entrusted you with the responsibility of giving spiritual leadership to our church and we remind you, “If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, they desire a noble task.” (1 Timothy 3:1)

Leaders: We do desire to do this task and are eager to serve God in this way.

Congregation: We charge you, in accordance with the Scriptures, to be of noble and godly character, holding firmly to the Word of God, and being active in prayer for us and the work God has given us to do.

Leaders: And we remind you of the Scriptures which say, “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

Congregation: We ask you to obey Peter’s command, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” (1 Peter 5:2-4)

Leaders: This very thing we will endeavor to do with all our might, trusting in the help of God through Christ.

Congregation: We will remember the verse which says that those “who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor . . .” (1 Timothy 5:17)

Leaders: And we will remember that “those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 3:13)

Congregation: “Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister in the house of the LORD.” (Psalm 134:1)

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Have a symbolic footwashing, with one leader representing all the leaders washing the feet of any representative of the congregation. A song about service might be sung during the washing.
- ✓ Have these leaders serve Communion to the congregation immediately following this installation. The song, “How Beautiful,” by Twila Paris is especially appropriate.
- ✓ Give each leader a token of their responsibility—a small white towel, for example.
- ✓ Interview some leaders, or have one person share, telling how serving in this way affects them, especially their walk with the Lord. Touch on both heartaches and blessings of the job.
- ✓ Invite short prayers from the congregation for their leaders.
- ✓ Use a special reading from Nehemiah 3. After a word of background to the text, Reader 1 begins reading the chapter. (It appears to be a rather uninteresting list of names and their assignment on the wall). After about six or seven verses, Reader 1 begins to grow quieter (mike fades out), while Reader 2’s voice begins low and grows louder, overlapping #1, listing the names and tasks of people in your church (e.g., Mary Smith never misses choir practice; the Nelsons often have people in their home; Don Brown has served as an elder for many years, etc.). Follow this with a song about faithful service.
- ✓ Have all the leaders read the church covenant, or a statement of faith, such as the Apostles’ Creed.

RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

New members are a great encouragement to a church. Time in a public service to welcome them allows the rest of the Body to connect names and faces, to be reminded of the basic commitments of all members, to see that their church is growing and is attractive to others, and to be reminded of the mutual commitments of love and sound doctrine we all share in the church. Usually the reception of new members is included in one of the regular morning worship services of the church.

The process of membership is defined in the local church's bylaws. Likewise, the customs for receiving new members may entail some local church traditions that the pastor needs to learn. Generally, receiving members may include the following elements:

- Opening comments addressing the subject of membership in the church
- Affirmations of doctrine and commitment by the new members
- Welcoming words and gesture (e.g., handshake, applause)
- Prayer for the new members

The pastor invites the new members to the front, as well as any other church leaders participating in the service. You may want to introduce them either as they come or later as they are officially welcomed. It is also useful to list new members' names in the bulletin.

Scripture

Psalm 133:1-3: How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down upon the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Matthew 10:32: Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."

John 13:34-35: Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Romans 12:10-13: Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Romans 15:5-7: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Ephesians 2:19-22: You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Ephesians 4:1-6: I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Hebrews 10:23-25: Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

1 Peter 2:1-5: Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:8-12: You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Explanation of Membership

- *Extemporaneous:* A summary of the requirements and process
- The Scriptures teach us that the church is the household of God, the body of which Christ is the Head, the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. As believers in Christ we are related to each other as members of his body. The persons before us have been brought into this holy relationship through their faith in Christ and by the work of the Holy Spirit. Having been examined and approved for membership in this church they come to be publicly received and welcomed by our congregation.

Affirmations

Churches differ somewhat on the precise matters they ask new members to affirm. Your bylaws probably give explicit instructions. Therefore, you may want to customize the following suggestions to fit your particular expectations. If your church has detailed expectations (such as affirming a doctrinal statement) a summary statement such as the suggestion below will suffice for the time constraints of a public service. Be certain the new members have been informed explicitly of what they are expected to affirm.

Option 1:

- Do you confess faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and do you desire above all else to live for him? *I do.*
- Do you declare your intention to live in harmony with the doctrine of this church? *I do.*
- Do you promise to nurture your walk with the Lord and to love other believers in this church? *I do.*
- Do you promise to support this congregation by your faithful attendance at its services, by your encouragement of its leaders, the willing use of your talents in its ministry and the giving of your means as God has prospered you? *I do.*

Option 2:

The new members (or all members present) may read in unison a church covenant such as this:

We covenant together, God helping us, to participate in the congregational life and worship of C**** Church.

We commit ourselves to a daily life of spiritual growth and service guided by God's Word and energized by his Spirit. We will strive to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ through the ministry of C**** Church by praying for one another, serving one another in love, being kind to one another, forgiving one another and encouraging one another. Since we recognize that our mission in the world is to make Jesus Christ known, we will seek to share his love with others. Moreover, we will hold to the doctrines and disciplines of C**** Church, under God, and contribute regularly to its ministry both at home and abroad. We will endeavor to be responsive to the leadership of the church as together we seek to become a people with a passion for God and a compassion for people.¹⁴

¹⁴ Highland Goodman

Welcoming Words and Gesture

It is an old custom to offer new members “the right hand of fellowship,” where the pastor and/or lay leader shake hands with each new member as a symbol of their welcome into the church. Other suitable gestures would be a gentle embrace, congregational applause, a song of Christian unity, or the giving of a small gift or certificate from the church. Comments might include:

- Dear friends: We give hearty thanks to God who has opened your hearts to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, and has led you to unite with us as a church. We hereby welcome and receive you into the membership of this congregation, and cordially extend to you the right hand of fellowship in Jesus’ precious name.
- *Extemporaneous:*
 - Express your delight in having them become part of the congregation
 - Note the encouragement they have brought through their testimony of Christ and their desire to become part of the fellowship.

Prayer:

This prayer may be offered as several brief prayers by different leaders, choosing from among the following options:

- *Extemporaneous:*
 - Couch your words in one or more of the biblical metaphors for the church: body, building, bride, flock of God, army, etc.
 - Thank God for these believers and his grace represented in their lives
 - Thank God for what they bring to this church—personal experiences with the Lord, specific spiritual gifts, passions and personalities.
 - Pray for their spiritual development and steadfastness in the faith.
- Dear Lord Jesus, our Bridegroom and Head, our Brother and Captain, our Cornerstone and High Priest, thank you for the church. Thank you that while once we were strangers and aliens, even rebels against you, you in your grace have not only saved us, but now through the adoption of our heavenly Father, you regard us as your own brothers and sisters.

We thank you for these who have formally joined our church. We are encouraged by their testimonies and their commitment not only to you, but to us. Grant that with us they may grow in grace and the knowledge of you, our Lord and Savior. Keep them from falling and strengthen them in Christlike living. Make them earnest and zealous in serving you in the church. Grant that by loving and being loved, blessing and being blessed, serving and being served, we may be prepared while we dwell together on earth for the perfect fellowship of the saints above. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Scriptural admonitions given as new members are welcomed:
 - Matthew 5:16:* Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”
 - Matthew 10:38-39:* Jesus said, “Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”
 - Colossians 2:6-7:* So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
 - 1 Timothy 6:12:* Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.
- ✓ A congregational response can follow the new members’ affirmations:
 - Ask the members present to stand. They can either read a statement printed in the bulletin or on the screen, or they may respond with a “We do” to a question by the pastor.

As members of C**** Church we gratefully welcome you into our fellowship. We affirm our commitment to love you and to share the work and fruits of the ministry with you.

Or...

Members of C**** Church, do you welcome these new members and affirm your commitment to love them and share the work and fruits of this ministry with them? *We do.*

- ✓ Pronounce a benediction over the new members. A benediction need not only be spoken at the conclusion of a service. It is God's blessing, appropriate at any time. Use one of the benedictions in the "General Worship Resources" section.
- ✓ When introducing the new members, if time permits, share some 'human interest' information that will help the congregation remember them—how they found the church, special ministry interests, an interesting detail of their testimony, their spiritual gift, something about their family, etc.
- ✓ Tie this ceremony into a Communion service. New members might be invited to serve, or may be seated in a special section where they are served first.
- ✓ Print the brief testimonies of the new members in the bulletin, church newsletter, or website, with pictures, if possible.
- ✓ Project pictures and names of the new members on the screen before the service begins and after it is concluded.
- ✓ A footwashing, perhaps of one representative from the new members, performed by a church leader, is a powerful symbol.
- ✓ Give each new member a small towel as a symbol of their responsibility to serve their brothers and sisters in the church.
- ✓ Have a brief reception after the service in honor of the new members.

Letter of Membership Transfer or Letter of Commendation

Some churches allow a transfer of membership from one church to another. Occasionally, someone who has moved from your congregation will request of "Letter of Transfer" from the pastor or church board. The request usually comes from the new church they are attending. The following sample assumes no reservations on your part. If there are concerns, such as poor attendance, discipline issues, or simply concern about spiritual development, a phone call to the other pastor might be more appropriate. Be clear but careful in your comments, whether written or spoken.

Dear friends in Christ,
N**** has indicated a desire to transfer membership from our church to yours. I hereby confirm that he/she has made a confession of faith in Jesus Christ and has been a member in good standing. We commend him/her to you for your ongoing love and oversight. Membership in this church will terminate with the sending of this letter.

Sincerely,

PART III: SPECIALS SERVICES IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

SERVICE OF GROUNDBREAKING

A service of groundbreaking is a joyful highlight in the life of any congregation following months of prayerful planning and preceding months of construction and growth. The service should be scheduled at a time when the whole congregation can gather. Attempt to involve a variety of officers and other members in the service. Since this service is held outdoors, perhaps with people standing, it should be brief. Typically, a new spade is provided, with each key leader turning over a shovelful of dirt.

Invocation

Song

Statement of Purpose

Remarks by the pastor, board chairman, or the building committee chairman which may include an overview of the history of the ways the Lord has led the congregation to this point in its life and how this new building is expected to help the cause of Christ.

Scripture

Ezra 3:10-11 – Dedication of the rebuilt Temple

2 Chronicles 3:1-2; with Ephesians 2:19-22 – Solomon's Temple and the spiritual temple of the church

Psalms 24 – "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?"

Psalms 100 – "Enter his gates with thanksgiving."

Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders

1 Corinthians 3:9-14 – Building on the foundation of the gospel

1 Peter 2:4-10 – "You, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house."

Prayer of Thanksgiving (Extemporaneous)

- Thanks for the blessing of God in coming to this point; for this property, help with the plans, the work of gifted people
- Thanks that it is God's people who are the temple of the Lord, not this building
- Thanks that God will help in all the work ahead, including providing the needed finances through his generous people even as David saw (*1 Chronicles 29:10ff.*).

Responsive Reading:

Leader: We have gathered as a church recognizing God's grace, which has brought us to this point in our life together.

People: We now break ground to the glory of our God.

Leader: And in grateful remembrance of his past blessings on our church.

People: We come with confidence in his ability to continue to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

Leader: According to his power that is at work within our church.

People: We now break ground in order that we might build a structure in which we can assemble for worship, instruction and fellowship, and then go forth to serve in our community and the world.

Leader: With God's help we will build asking,

People: May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us;

Leader: Establish the work of our hands for us—

People: Yes, establish the work of our hands so Christ might be glorified in this church throughout all generations. Amen.

Act of Groundbreaking

The first person to turn over a shovelful of earth may say:

“In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we break this ground. Amen.”

Following this, other individuals who have been selected in advance may take turns with the shovel.

Song of praise and thanksgiving

Prayer (*Extemporaneous*)

- For the safety and blessing of all who work on the construction
- For wisdom as unexpected challenges arise
- For favor in the eyes of the community
- For continuing unity and perseverance by the congregation as they wait for this building to be finished
- For the glory and grace of God to be evident throughout the months of building ahead

Song (celebrating the church or God’s guidance)

Benediction

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, 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 throughout all generations. Amen. (*Hebrews 13:20-21*)

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Be sure pictures and/or a video is taken of this momentous occasion.
- ✓ Ask people to share what they are most looking forward to in the new building (if such sharing can be heard).
- ✓ Give a memento of this occasion to serve as a prayer reminder during the months of construction.

LAYING OF THE CORNERSTONE

Traditionally, an engraved cornerstone is set in the foundation of a church to commemorate the year it was built. The year and sometimes a short phrase are carved into the stone. Sometimes a time capsule is included within the stone. The stone may be laid in the early stages of construction, but more frequently is inserted into a cut-out in the foundation upon completion of the building. (For further suggestions see “Dedication of a Church Building” and “Service of Groundbreaking.”)

Welcome

Call to Worship

Leader: Let us join in worshipping the Lord on this joyful day.

People: We lay this cornerstone in the name of Christ, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him.

Leader: This Stone the builders rejected has become the Capstone.

People: As members of God’s household we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Chief Cornerstone.

Leader: In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

People: And in him we are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Leader: Like living stone we are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.

People: So we now offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Glory be to him in this church as we lay this cornerstone. Amen.

Song

Prayer of Thanksgiving (*Extemporaneous*)

- That Christ is the true Cornerstone, and God’s people are his temple
- For the history and future of this church, evidences of God’s hand

Scripture

1 Chronicles 29:10-18 – David’s prayer for the building of the Temple

Ezra 3:8-13 – Dedication of the rebuilt Temple

Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders

Matthew 16:13-17 – Peter’s confession; “On this rock I will build my church...”

1 Corinthians 3:10-17 – Building on the foundation of the gospel

Ephesians 2:19-22 – “Being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

1 Peter 2:4-10 – “You, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house...”

Comments by Church Leader

Describe the building process and the hopes of the church for the use of this structure. He may speak ways in which the church has seen God at work in this process. If there is a time capsule, describe the contents, showing them as they are mentioned, and explain what they mean to the church. Then place the box in the cornerstone.

Laying of the Stone

To be read in unison, or the congregation can repeat after the leader, phrase by phrase.

We lay the cornerstone of this building to be known as (name of church) to the honor of the triune God to whom we belong and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we confess as the Chief Cornerstone and the Head of our church. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

- Ask that all that is built in this place, both physically and spiritually, will please God
- Dedicate the future of this church and building to the Lord

Song (e.g., “The Doxology”)

Benediction

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Give each family a memento of this occasion to serve as a reminder to pray for the time of construction and for the spiritual building of the church.
- ✓ Take pictures. This is a key time in the church's history.

DEDICATION OF A CHURCH BUILDING

Few events in the life of a church are greeted with such anticipation as the completion and dedication of a new church building. The service should be scheduled at a time when the whole congregation can gather and when community and denominational guests as well as the contractors and workers may also be present. Since this is one of the most momentous events in a church's history, it should be carefully planned and should be conducted with special decorum. In addition to an order of service, the bulletin or folder should give a brief history of the building process and details about the building itself, including its construction. Key people, such as the building committee, architect, and construction firm and foreman should also be listed. This folder is part of the historical record of the church.

If this building contains a worship center or sanctuary, the service should take special advantage of the features this congregation has long awaited to enhance their worship. Here is a time to pull out all the stops! If, on the other hand, a building or wing not containing a worship center is being dedicated, issues of space and acoustics may require a simple service. The service may be held in the sanctuary with a portion of the service time given to leaving the auditorium and moving to the new wing or building for special dedicatory acts and then returning.

The focus of the service, of course, is not the building but Christ, the Lord of the church. All the 'temple' and 'building' language of Scripture point in the end to God's *people*. The metaphor of the temple is rich and useful at this time, but do not let people mistake this new building for God's temple or sanctuary. Still, there is something wonderful to be said for a holy place, and it is for that reason we dedicate our buildings to the Lord.

The order of service will vary considerably from church to church, but in addition to both congregational singing and special music befitting your setting, these elements are frequently used:

Scripture

1 Kings 8:22-63 – Solomon dedicates the Temple
1 Chronicles 29:10-19 – David's thanksgiving for the Temple offerings
Nehemiah 27-43 – Dedication of Jerusalem's wall
2 Chronicles 3:1-2; with Ephesians 2:19-22 – God's people are his temple
Psalms 24 – "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?"
Psalms 84 – "How lovely is your dwelling place..."
Psalms 100 – "Enter his gates with thanksgiving..."
Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders
Matthew 16:13-19 – "On this rock I will build my church"
John 2:18-22 – "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again..."
1 Corinthians 3:10-17 – "Each one should be careful how he builds"
Ephesians 4:11-16 – "...that the body of Christ may be built up"
Hebrews 11:8-10 – Abraham "looking forward to the city with foundations"
1 Peter 2:4-10 – "You, like living stones, are being built..."
Revelation 4-5 – The heavenly sanctuary
Revelation 21:1-27 – The New Jerusalem

Dedication Sermon

Presentation of Keys

By the chairman of the building committee, the architect, or the general contractor. He/she may speak of the construction process, characteristics of the building, and that this long process has come to a conclusion. He may conclude with a formal statement like...

Having completed our work in constructing this building for the C**** Church, I present to you the keys that you might use and enjoy this building for the glory of God.

Acceptance of Keys

By the chairman of the church, or the members of the governing board. He may express thanks for their work on behalf of the church, noting the joy of this occasion. He may conclude with a formal statement like...

On behalf of C**** Church, I accept these keys with gratitude for your work. May God richly bless you for your efforts on our behalf.

Congregational Act of Dedication

Pastor: Dear brothers and sisters, we have assembled today to set apart this building to be a place of worship, equipping, fellowship and service. We believe that God has put it into our hearts to erect this building and we know that the Lord has guided our minds and strengthened our hands for the task. His Spirit has moved us to bring our gifts that it might be built for the glory of God and the salvation and blessing of men. We consider this beautiful structure to be a loving gift of God to us and to our children and we joyfully desire to dedicate this building to its sacred purpose. Since God enabled us to finish this work to which he called us...

People: We do now with gratitude and joy solemnly consecrate this building.

Pastor: To the everlasting God, our Father, in whom we live and move and have our being; who gives every good and perfect gift; who so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...

People: We dedicate this building.

Pastor: To Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who loved us and gave himself for us in the death on the cross; who rose again and lives forevermore; the way, the truth, and the life...

People: We dedicate this building.

Pastor: To the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Guide, who regenerates our hearts, leads us to repentance, prompts our love for God and one another, who sets the assurance of our salvation deep within our souls, and who gifts us for service...

People: We dedicate this building.

Pastor: For worship in prayer and praise; for the ministry of the Word of God and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ as Savior from sin; to the salvation of souls and the upbuilding of the church in the grace and knowledge of our Lord; for the administration of the holy ordinances...

People: We dedicate this building.

Pastor: For the instruction of children and youth in the truths of the Christian faith; for the sanctification of the family; for the promotion of Christian character...

People: We dedicate this building

Pastor: For comfort to those who mourn; for strength to those who are tempted; for help in Christian living...

People: We dedicate this building

Pastor: For our equipping to serve our community as salt and light, stopping moral decay, and exposing and banishing darkness...

People: We dedicate this building

Pastor: For sympathy and fellowship with the needy; for brotherhood with all men; for the essential unity with all believers in Jesus Christ...

People: We dedicate this building

Pastor: For missionary endeavor at home and abroad; for world-wide evangelism and Christian education, till the return of our Lord Jesus Christ...

People: We dedicate this building

Pastor: In grateful remembrance of all who have loved and served this church and especially those now among the cloud of witnesses surrounding us...

People: We dedicate this building

Pastor and the People: We now, the people of C**** Church, dedicate ourselves anew to worship God in spirit and in truth, to love one another, to preach the Word, and to seek the salvation of the lost, and we dedicate this entire building with all its furnishings in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dedication Prayer

O Christ, Lord of the Church, we thank you today for this beautiful structure that you have given this congregation. Thank you for what you have built into this Body as we worked to build this structure. Thank you for the faith we have gained, the reward of sacrificial giving; for the unity of purpose and the clarified sense of vision. And thank you for our increased joy.

We pray today that you would equip this building for spiritual purposes as no earthly architect could. Make it a concert hall resounding with the harmonies of praise. Make this a banquet hall, where the people of God in sweet fellowship dine upon the bread of life and where their thirst is quenched by living water, a foretaste of heaven's feast. Make this building a hospital for the care and cure of souls, and a fortress where the wounded can find refuge in him who is our Rock. Lord, may no one—especially our precious children—ever be harmed here by sinful people. May this place be a kind of freedom bridge, where captives walk out of bondage into liberty, where lost people are found, and where orphans are adopted into our Father's family. And may this building be a workshop for the shaping of Christlike saints, equipped with the tools of the Word, worship, prayer and fellowship.

Lord, in the Old Testament, sacred places were made holy by the sprinkling of blood on the walls and fixtures, so here, we pray, the blood of Jesus may be sprinkled in every wall and walk and window, that all our comings and goings might be touched by the presence and purity of Christ.

And Lord, as we gather here week after week, even generation after generation, for worship and fellowship, training and planning, may we be built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit, until the day this building stands deserted and unnecessary because we have all been gathered to our heavenly home.

We make such bold requests in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dedication Prayer (Extemporaneous)

This prayer might be offered in parts by several people, perhaps even separated by songs and other elements.

- Build on the truths and images in some of the Scriptures above, especially Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:22-63.
- Recognize the way God has sustained the church through the stresses that came from an inadequate building till now.
- Thank God for specific things about this new structure which especially delight the congregation.
- Pray that this building will never become a source of division, never fall into ungodly hands, never house a false gospel.
- Pray that it might be a lighthouse of the gospel, a fortress protecting truth, a refuge for those who need safety, a school of discipleship, a sanctuary of worship, and a strategic center for advancing God's kingdom.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ If possible, the Presentation and Acceptance of the Keys is the very first act in this service, and is done outside the building, the whole congregation assembled and waiting. Then the keys are used to unlock the doors and all proceed to the worship center for the rest of the service. If this is done, the remarks indicated above by the building chair, architect, etc. can be saved for the service. Only the formal words would be said outside the doors. To gather and focus attention, it would be best to begin with the singing of a familiar song before the presentation is made.
- ✓ Use the Apostles' Creed or another statement of faith as a way of affirming the church's commitment to sound doctrine in this new place.
- ✓ Members of the congregation who will especially benefit from various parts of the building might be assembled for a special thanksgiving reading. (E.g., "Our youth group is thankful for our new rooms where we can invite our friends and learn of the Lord.") After each such statement, the congregation might respond together, "We give thanks to the Lord with you."
- ✓ Special greetings and well-wishes might be brought from denominational and civic leaders. Former pastors might also be invited.
- ✓ A special "thank offering" might be received to go to another church—perhaps one overseas, or a church plant—which is likewise in need of a building.

- ✓ If some treasured furnishing from an old building is being kept, special ceremony might be given its being brought into this new place.
- ✓ A Guest Book might be used to record the names of those who attend and to hold other documents and photos of this event.
- ✓ Be sure photos and video are taken to remember this historic occasion.
- ✓ Seek local newspaper coverage of this important community event.
- ✓ Arrange an open house, perhaps in conjunction with an outreach event, so people from the community can see your new building.
- ✓ If a cornerstone is used, see “Laying of the Cornerstone”.

DEDICATION OF MINISTRY TOOLS *(Instruments, Furnishings, Vehicles, Equipment, etc.)*

Churches regularly acquire things that enhance their ministry, but occasionally something is gotten that is of special delight or importance to the congregation. It may be the result of a major fundraising project, a memorial gift, or something which has long been sought in prayer. Pausing to dedicate this tool, in a regular service or at some special time, reminds everyone that all we have belongs to the Lord, and also that anything dedicated to his use becomes a holy thing, and God is liable to use it in surprising ways. It may be that the dedication might only be among those who directly use this item rather than the entire church.

Scripture

Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13 – “If you know how to give good gifts... how much more...”

2 Corinthians 9:8-15 – The thanksgiving that results from generous gifts

Acts 4:36-37 – The generosity of Barnabas

Philippians 4:14-19 – The “fragrant offering” of the Philippians’ gift

Acknowledgements

While it is generally not appropriate to give special attention to givers in the church (for we should not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing), there are occasions when a special gift—especially when it is a memorial gift—should be acknowledged with gratitude. Since memorial gifts often are indicative of the special interests of the one in whose name they are given, it would be good to talk about that person’s burden and interest. Remind the people that this gift will not only always remind us of the one memorialized, but also Jesus Christ, whose infinitely generous gift of salvation shaped this person’s generous heart.

If the gift is the combined effort of many, acknowledge the work and vision that made this gift possible, recognizing especially any leaders in this undertaking, and thanking God for what he has done through ordinary people who love him and his church.

Formal Acceptance of the Gift

This may be done by the church chairman or another key leader whose ministry is most affected by this gift. Formal words like these may be used:

On behalf of our congregation, I accept your generous gift of _____ and pledge to you its use in our fellowship to the glory of God and the advancement of his Kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I also thank you through the words of the Apostle Paul: “because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (*Philippians 1:5,6*).

Dedication Prayer

This prayer can be offered by the pastor or the officer of the congregation and, in the case of memorial, may include thanksgiving for the life and service of the one memorialized. The tool is dedicated to God for his use and pleasure. Pray that it will never be used for any unholy purpose, but always for the glory of God.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ If the person memorialized left loved ones, a recording and/or photos of this event might be given them along with a special card or letter thanking them (if they had a hand in this memorial gift) and recognizing the special memories of their loved one this service invoked.
- ✓ If memorial gifts are common in your church, a special book can be acquired for keeping a record. Such books are available through Christian bookstores.
- ✓ A plaque or small engraved plate affixed on or near the item will help people remember this special giver or occasion.

BURNING OF A MORTGAGE

Without a mortgage many churches would not ever be able to erect the building that houses their ministry, yet when the time finally arrives that the mortgage is paid off it is a joyous day indeed. Time in a morning service should be set aside to celebrate this accomplishment. It is the end of a long and costly process, and the beginning of new opportunities.

The securing of this mortgage in the first place years earlier was an act of faith on the part of the church at that time. They were committing themselves to a serious responsibility believing that God was working in their church and would continue to do so. It had been a sober day when church officers had affixed their names to this mortgage. So when the mortgage is paid off, it is a time to rejoice, not only celebrating freedom from the financial responsibility, but honoring those who took this step in the first place and all who have given to make this day possible.

In fact, the real mortgage papers should *not* be burned. They remain an important legal record. Photocopies should be used for the symbolic purpose of this burning. Anytime fire is used in a building special care must be taken. It is customary to burn the pages of the mortgage in a large pan or bowl. Be sure a fire extinguisher is discreetly at hand. Different people, two or three board members, for example, may ignite different pieces or pages of the mortgage from a candle, or the church chairman may burn a single page.

You may wish to ask those who were members of the church when the mortgage was signed to stand or come to the front. This provides a rare opportunity to recognize and honor those who have been part of the church for a long time.

Scripture

Choose from among these texts to read, craft a congregational reading, or paraphrase into a prayer.

1 Chronicles 29:10-18 – David’s thanksgiving for Temple offerings

Psalms 84 – “How lovely is your dwelling place”

Psalms 121 – “The LORD watches over you”

Psalms 125 – “Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion”

Psalms 126 – “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy”

Psalms 133 – “How good and pleasant when brothers dwell together in unity”

Psalms 134 – “Praise the LORD in his sanctuary”

Romans 13:8 – “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another”

2 Corinthians 9:8-14 – Generous giving

Remembering with Thanksgiving:

If one of the officers whose name appears on the mortgage is still active in the church, you might interview him, asking what the church was like at that time, what he remembers of the process of securing the mortgage and erecting the building, and how they approached this undertaking spiritually.

A current officer might reflect on all the ministry opportunities that the church has had, thanks to this structure.

A financial officer might report how many payments have been made over how many months, and any other interesting financial background. He/she might also explain what the giving that has gone to the mortgage will now be used for.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (*Extemporaneous*)

A congregational prayer, in the fashion of a responsive reading, might be crafted from *1 Chronicles 29:10-18*. The church chairman or other officer might also pray using some of these ideas:

- Thanks for God’s protection over these years, recognizing a mortgage carries serious responsibility that the church has faithfully met.
- Thanks that these funds were available, and for the use of the building all these years.
- Thanks for generous giving by the people. (cf. *1 Chronicles 29:14*)
- Pray for future challenges that will keep the church’s faith and commitment stretched and growing.

The Burning of the Mortgage

As the papers are burned (see notes above), be prepared to break into a joyful song of thanksgiving, such as “The Doxology” or a familiar praise song.

CELEBRATION OF A CHURCH ANNIVERSARY

Significant anniversaries of a church's founding (5th, 10th, 25th, etc.) are important milestones well worthy of celebrating together. These celebrations offer the opportunity to revisit the significant work of God in a church's earlier years, to honor its founders, charter members and previous pastors, and to set the stage for the initiatives ahead.

Many of the activities surrounding an anniversary do not happen in a Sunday morning service—a banquet, commemorative literature, special work or financial projects, etc. But these occasions offer a wonderful opportunity for a service of thanksgiving. An anniversary celebration may also coincide with a homecoming emphasis in which those who have moved away are invited back for a special weekend of fellowship and memories.

Scripture

Deuteronomy 31:9-13 – Moses: every seven years assemble the people and read the Law

Joshua 4 – Stone monuments set up to mark God's work among his people

Nehemiah 8 – At the completion of building Jerusalem's walls, Ezra reads the Law and they react with both repentance and joy ("the joy of the LORD is your strength")

Psalms 121 – "My help comes from the LORD"

Psalms 122 – "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD'."

Psalms 124 – Praise for God's protection

Psalms 133 – "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

Psalms 136 – "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever." [Adapt by including the blessings of God upon this church followed by the congregational response, "His love endures forever."]

Psalms 145 – Praising God for his awesome works and grace among his people

Romans 16 – This seemingly mundane list of personal greetings offers opportunity to celebrate the unique contributions of many ordinary individuals in every healthy church. You might write a parallel reading using people from your congregation

Ephesians 2:19-22 – "You too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

For other texts, see "Dedication of a Building," "Laying of the Cornerstone," and "Burning of a Mortgage."

Readings

The two readings that follow are examples that can be adapted to fit specific information about your church and its history.¹⁵

Congregational Celebration of God's Faithfulness

Leader reads the main statements with the congregation responding.

For God's gracious love that led Jesus Christ to die as our Savior and the Holy Spirit to draw us to him and now to indwell us, we say...

Great is thy faithfulness.

For the foresight given to our founding, charter members to seek your will in forming a new church, we proclaim...

Great is thy faithfulness.

For providing pastoral leadership to help us during each stage of our church's life, we say...

Great is thy faithfulness.

For providing for our financial needs through the sacrificial giving of your people, we gratefully acknowledge...

Great is thy faithfulness.

For leading people to use their spiritual gifts, talents and abilities to serve in innumerable ways in order that the Body might grow strong and Christlike, we humbly say...

Great is thy faithfulness.

¹⁵ Dan Foote; adapted

For entrusting to us children and youth to disciple for Christ, that they may extend our ministry over miles and years, we gratefully say...

Great is thy faithfulness.

For giving us a vision beyond our walls and missionaries to represent us around the world, we say...

Great is thy faithfulness.

For guiding C**** Church through ____ years of worship, outreach, discipleship and fellowship, fulfilling promises and honoring the faith of our congregation, we say...

Great is thy faithfulness.

Reading of Congregational Commitment

Leader: In response to God's great love, which he demonstrated by first loving us and sending Christ to be our Savior...

People: We commit ourselves to loving him.

Leader: In grateful recognition of the indwelling Holy Spirit and his omniscient direction...

People: We submit ourselves to his leadership.

Leader: Knowing a great cloud of witnesses who have been steadfast in their faith surrounds us...

People: We commit ourselves to walk by faith and not by sight.

Leader: Recognizing Christ's example in prayer and Scripture's command that we ought always to pray...

People: We renew our resolve to pray for the advancement of God's Kingdom and the revival of the church.

Leader: Despite the pressures of a secular culture to focus on material possessions and human priorities...

People: We commit ourselves to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Leader: Recognizing our interdependence on fellow believers and our obligation to minister to each other...

People: We resolve to love and serve one another, and not to forsake assembling together.

Leader: Because we know that the Holy Spirit has gifted each believer for spiritually effective service in the Body and beyond...

People: We commit to using our spiritual gifts in service of one another and those who have yet to trust Christ.

Leader: Recognizing that every gift comes from God, who deserves our faithful stewardship of resources...

People: We promise regular and sacrificial giving to support our church's ministries and mission.

Leader: Since we know that faith and maturity in Christ requires feeding on the Word of God...

People: We commit to regular personal and group Bible study, as well as careful attention to the preached Word.

Leader: In recognition of God's past, present and future faithfulness to us in Christ, as evidenced by these ____ years of his blessing...

People: We commit to worship and serve our Lord Jesus Christ until he returns. "Even so, come Lord Jesus!"

Prayer of Thanks

An extemporaneous prayer can be drawn from the following thoughts.

Lord Jesus, you are our Redeemer, the Head of our church, our elder Brother, our Cornerstone, Shepherd and Bridegroom. You are our Lord and King. We count it an everlasting privilege to be called *your* church and body, your *chosen* people and royal priesthood, your flock and bride.

We recognize what a fragile thing a church is—how easily sin and selfishness can deaden a congregation and destroy her witness. So the fact that we're here today, marking this anniversary, is a tribute to you.

Thank you for raising up leaders who have guided and taught us and for the extraordinary range of spiritual gifts which have made it possible for us to function as your Body. Thank you for new believers who have given us the fresh joy of the gospel. Thank you for helping so many who have passed through these doors to grow in grace and the knowledge of you, Lord Jesus.

Thank you for the sweet and holy worship we have so often enjoyed, for the embrace of loving fellowship, for faithful teaching of the Bible, and for your sustaining grace when we struggled. Thank you for the places you have given us to meet, the community in which we minister, and for the missionaries who represent you and us far beyond our walls.

Thank you for “a hope and a future,” for Kingdom assignments and alliances that make our presence here important and strategic. Thank you that there are brothers and sisters yet to come to our fellowship, some who do not yet know you. Thank you for the wonderful assurance that one day we will gather with you and with one another at that feast for which we all yearn, the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Thank you for letting us be the C**** Church, a church of Jesus Christ. All this is possible because of him, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Invite congregational sharing in the service, finishing the sentence, “One significant way God touched my life through this church was...”
- ✓ Show a video or slide history of the church.
- ✓ Invite former pastors to attend, or at least to send a letter of recollections which can be read to the congregation.

PART IV: SPECIAL SERVICES FOR THE FAMILY

THE WEDDING

The importance of marriage is clear in Scripture: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). It is one of the pastor’s great privileges to perform weddings. Thorough pre-marital counseling should precede any wedding. Many churches make it an unbending requirement.

Pastors differ on the question of whether to perform weddings for those who are not believers. Some feel it is inappropriate for a Minister of the Gospel while others see it as an excellent evangelistic opportunity. (A service for nonbelievers, which does not include the promises of God’s blessings to those who trust him is found later in this section.) In keeping with 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, pastors should not perform a wedding between a believer and nonbeliever.

There is great latitude in the elements of a wedding. Customs change with time and place, but it is the pastor’s duty to see that all things are done with dignity and joy, and with the honor of Christ preeminent. Included here are many optional elements and ideas. You may wish to give some of these options to the couple in print or digital form, and allow them to choose those which are most meaningful to them. Be careful of offering this to unbelievers in that many of these elements would not be appropriate for them, in that they are overtly Christian.

Be sure you know if the couple prefers their given names rather than nicknames (e.g., William, rather than Bill). The photographer and videographer will want to know any policies the church may have regarding pictures taken during the ceremony. (At the very least, do not allow pictures on the platform during the ceremony unless there is very discreet location. Some churches prohibit flash photography during the ceremony, though not during the processional.) You may occasionally be asked to share the service with other clergy. The guidelines for such cooperation are to be established by the host church or pastor.

You may find it helpful to have a wedding coordinator from the church who works with the couple on the physical arrangements for the ceremony and questions about church use. The coordinator works with the pastor in both the rehearsal and the wedding itself.

The wedding rehearsal is critical to the success of the ceremony. Begin with comments about both the dignity and joy of this occasion. Emphasize to the attendants that they are acting as witnesses to solemn vows, and it is their responsibility to help hold this couple accountable to their vows. Pray that the ceremony would honor God, the most honored of all the guests. Many pastors begin the rehearsal by positioning the wedding party at the front, as if the processional had just finished. Then walk through the ceremony from that point. After that, go through the movements of the entire service, beginning with the processional, a time or two. If there is no wedding coordinator to do so, be sure you give instructions to ushers (often the groomsmen) on the order of seating, etiquette, etc.

Two other notes: (1) Be sure you know the requirements of your state for officiating at a wedding. Some states require officiating ministers to be registered with the state while others do not. (2) This is a formal occasion usually requiring a suit, white shirt and tie, unless the bridal couple instructs otherwise. In the rare event that formal wear be required, a black robe is a proper alternative to a tuxedo.

ACTIVITIES PRECEDING AND FOLLOWING THE CEREMONY

Candles, if used, may be lit before guests are seated, or as part of the pre-ceremony activities, before the seating of the parents. This is usually done by two of the ushers.

Prelude - usually beginning 15 – 30 minutes before the service.

Seating of guests - bride’s family and friends to the left when facing front, groom’s to the right, unless they are not somewhat equal numbers. In that case, the couple may choose to ignore this custom.

Seating of grandparents and great grandparents - groom’s first, then bride’s.

Seating of groom’s parents

Seating of bride’s mother (assuming her father is escorting the bride). At this point, some couples have the two mothers light the two candles by the unity candle.

Placing of the white runner (*Optional*) - After this point, no one is to walk on this runner except the bridal party. Latecomers should be seated via the side aisles.

Entry of the pastor and groom's party – The pastor enters first, followed by the groom, best man, and groomsmen, with the pastor going to his place on the platform, while the groom's party proceeds to the head of the aisle to await the bride. The men typically enter from the side—either a side room or down a side aisle. They do not use the center aisle, which is reserved for the bride and her party. It is also acceptable to have the groomsmen enter escorting the bridesmaids. The best man, however, always accompanies the groom and not the maid of honor.

Bridal procession – bridesmaids first, ring bearer and flower girl, maid of honor. (Some brides have the attendants enter as couples. In that case, only the best man and maid/matron of honor enter alone.) At this point, the music often changes, the bride's mother stands, signaling the congregation to stand, and the bride enters, traditionally escorted by her father. When all are in place the pastor may signal the congregation to be seated, or may begin the ceremony and seat people after a call to worship and/or prayer.

Ceremony (see below)

Recessional - The couple exits together. When they have left the sanctuary, the other attendants recess quickly as couples. The pastor may stay in position until the parents are escorted out and then exit. If there is a receiving line, guests should be dismissed by rows.

Postlude

Ushering out of the family – The order would be, bride's parents, groom's parents, bride's grandparents, groom's grandparents

Ushering out of remaining guests

Receiving line and reception

Note: You may have parents or grandparents who are estranged from one another attend the wedding, making seating arrangements somewhat awkward. Remarriage of parents to new partners complicates seating further. For this reason, sometimes a mother and father may be seated in different rows.

A TRADITIONAL CEREMONY

Call to worship:

- I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God;
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with jewels. (*Isaiah 61:10*)
- Dear friends, God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (*1 John 4:16*)
- Today we celebrate how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is, and we want to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (*Ephesians 3:18-19*)

Invocation (*Extemporaneous*; for a written invocation, see “Other Options”)

Invite God's presence and recognize that marriage is part of his good plan. Ask God's Spirit to supervise the service and sanctify all that happens.

Welcome

Greet the guests on behalf of the bride and groom. If you wish, you may make brief personal comments about your relationship with the couple. This is also a wonderful opportunity to recognize parents who have raised these their children faithfully and wisely.

Song or Special Music: *Optional*

Statement on Marriage:

A statement such as this summarizes the Christian view of marriage. If the couple wishes for a more informal service, the pastor can summarize the biblical view of marriage extemporaneously. See “Other Options.”

Dearly beloved, we are assembled here in the presence of God, to join this man and this woman in holy marriage; which is instituted of God, regulated by his commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people. Let us therefore reverently remember that God has established and sanctified marriage, for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Our Savior has declared that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. By His apostles, he has instructed those who enter into this relation to cherish a mutual esteem and love; to bear with each other’s infirmities and weaknesses; to comfort each other in sickness, trouble, and sorrow; in honesty and industry to provide for each other, and for their household, in temporal things; to pray for and encourage each other in the things which pertain to God; and to live together as the heirs of the grace of life.¹⁶

Vows of Intent

In effect, many weddings use two sets of vows. These “Vows of Intent” may also precede the vows after the minister’s meditation, as two parts of the same vows. Used at this point in the service, the ceremonial implication is that the bride’s father is hearing these as a condition of giving his daughter.

G****, will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together in holy marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her and forsaking all others, keep only unto her as long as you both shall live? (*Groom answers, “I will.”*)

B****, will you have this man to be your wedded husband, to live together in holy marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him and forsaking all others, keep only unto him as long as you both shall live? (*Bride answers, “I will.”*)

Giving of the Bride:

Sometimes this happens immediately after the invocation. In any case, the pastor says, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?”

Father: “Her mother and I.” (The father, guardian, brother or friend of the woman shall put the woman’s right hand in the right hand of the man. She may give him a kiss. At this point the wedding party may move forward so the couple is directly in front of the pastor.)

Song or Special Music: *Optional*

Scripture

- Genesis 2:18-24* - Eve brought to Adam
- Ruth 1:16-17* - Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi
- Psalms 121* - “I lift up my eyes to the hills...”
- Psalms 127* - “Unless the Lord builds the house...”
- Psalms 128* - The blessing of a large family
- Ecclesiastes 4:8-12* - “Two are better than one...”
- Song 2:10-13* - The season of love
- Song 8:6-7* - “Many waters cannot quench love...”
- Isaiah 61:1-4* - “...to bestow on them a crown of beauty...”
- Malachi 2:15-16* - Warning not to break faith in marriage
- Matthew 19:4-6* - Jesus’ restatement of Genesis 2:24
- John 2:1-11* - The wedding and miracle at Cana
- Romans 12:9-13* - Guidelines for loving one another
- 1 Corinthians 13* - The love chapter
- Ephesians 5:18-33* - Paul’s teaching on marriage

¹⁶ Adapted slightly from *The Book of Common Worship* (Philadelphia: The Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1946), p.183.

Philippians 2:1-11 - Assuming the humble attitude of Christ
Colossians 3:12-14 - Qualities of Christian relationships
2 Peter 1:5-8 - "...add to your faith goodness," etc.
1 John 4:7-12 - "Let us love one another..."

Meditation (also called The Charge to the Bride and Groom)

You may want to base your remarks on the text just read. This brief message should be 5-10 minutes unless arrangements are made for the wedding party to be seated.

Vows

The pastor may say, "Will you now make your vows to one another?"

The man and the woman are to face each other, holding hands. The bride gives her flowers to the maid of honor. The groom repeats the vow after the pastor as follows:

I, G****, take you B****, to be my wedded wife, / to have and to hold from this day forward, / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish, till death us do part, / according to God's holy plan / and with God's gracious help.

[**Alternate ending:** ...according to God's holy ordinance; / and thereto I pledge to you my troth.¹⁷ *Or* and thereto I pledge myself to you.]

The bride repeats the vow after the pastor as follows:

I, B****, take you, G****, to be my wedded husband, / to have and to hold from this day forward, / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish, till death us do part, / according to God's holy plan / and with God's gracious help.

Giving of Rings:

You have determined to seal your vows by the giving and receiving of rings. Rings are a sacred symbol, signaling to others that you are in an exclusive commitment to your beloved. The precious metal from which they are forged reminds you of the precious possession you have in marriage. The infinite circle they form remind you that your new relationship is never to end.

G****, indicating your responsibility to B**** to receive her into your care and keeping, I give you this ring to place on her finger, as both a symbol and promise that you receive her. Just as this ring circles her finger, so you are to encompass her with strength and protecting love.

Groom (repeating after the pastor):

B****, this ring I give you / as a constant reminder / of my abiding love and commitment.

B****, indicating your responsibility to G****, to receive him into your care and devotion, I give you this ring to place on his finger as both a symbol and promise that you receive him. Just as this ring circles his finger, so you are to encompass him with strength and protecting love.

Bride (repeating after the pastor):

G****, this ring I give you / as a constant reminder / of my abiding love and commitment.

[**Alternative:** This ring I give you / in token and pledge / of our constant faith and abiding love.]

Optional: Unity Candle

Special music is often done during the unity candle ceremony. Another alternative is the reading of Gen. 2:20b-24. Typically, couples extinguish their individual candles after lighting the central candle. At this point, some choose to present roses to their mothers. The unity candle can also be done after the pronouncement. The couples may choose other symbols of marriage such as the braiding of a rope ("a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" – Ecclesiastes 4:12), a handfasting, or a wedding custom from another culture. Some couples prefer to omit this section.

¹⁷ Troth means truthfulness; one's reputation as a truthful person.

Prayer of Dedication

Couples may kneel if a kneeling bench is provided, but more commonly they stand facing the pastor. The Lord's Prayer may be spoken or sung at the conclusion of this prayer. See "Other Options" for longer prayers.

Our eternal Father, send your blessing upon G**** and B****, whom we bless in your name, that they may live faithfully together. May they keep the vows they have made, and may they remain ever in perfect love and peace together, and live according to your Word, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pronouncement

For inasmuch as G**** and B**** have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have pledged their faith each to the other, and have declared the same by joining hands and by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife together, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder. [*Or* let no one separate.]

Kiss

You may kiss your bride.

Benediction

"The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace" (*Numbers 6:24-26*).

Presentation of Couple:

(The bride retrieves her flowers from the maid of honor and the couple turns to face the congregation.)

It gives me great delight to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. _____

OTHER OPTIONS

Call to Worship

Of all the honored guests at this occasion, the One most special, most honored, will be the Lord God Almighty, our heavenly Father and loving Savior. In mercy, he will shield us from his shining presence. His voice, which unleashed is like the sound of many waters, will only whisper silently in hearts. But he is certainly here, for the creation of a home is his doing as surely as the creation of oceans or oaks.

While this is G**** and B****'s special day, we would be remiss not to acknowledge such a royal Visitor, such a holy Guest. It is his presence that will make this day truly significant. It is his listening that makes these vows so solemn. It is his smile that puts laughter on our lips and brings delight to this day. Let us pray.

Invocation

Lord, we invite you to take the place of honor at this wedding. We are grateful that you would come. To think that the God who is robed in unapproachable light would bring his glory to this service, that the King who reigns over all the universe from his sapphire throne would bring his dignity and grandeur to this ceremony, that the Savior who blessed little children and the Creator of roses would bring his tenderness and beauty to this celebration leaves us in awe. Loving Father, thank you for being here with us. May G**** and B**** have a special sense and appreciation of the privilege of your presence. We know that this warm favor is only ours through the grace of Jesus Christ so it is in his name we pray this. Amen.

Statements on Marriage

- G**** and B****, marriage is an honorable estate whose bond and covenant was instituted by God in creation. Our Lord Jesus Christ adorned and beautified this holy estate by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Marriage signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his church. And Scripture commands that marriage be honored among all people. Therefore, no one should enter this state of life unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained.¹⁸

¹⁸Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, "The Rehearsal and Ceremony", in *Weddings, Funerals and Special Events in The Leadership Library* (Carol Stream, Ill.: CTi, and Waco, Tx.: Word Books, 1987), p.66.

- At the beginning of the Bible, we discover the first instance of the marriage state when Adam discovers Eve and exclaims, "This at last is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh." So intimate is this oneness between male and female that in the New Testament Paul uses it to illustrate the intimacy between Christ and the church. He also draws a clear line separating the distinctive functions of husband and wife, when he instructs the woman to be submissive to her husband as to the Lord, and commands the man to love his wife as Christ has loved the church, giving himself up for her.

G**** and B****, marriage is established by God. In this contract a man and woman willingly bind themselves together in love and become one, even as Christ is one with the church, his Body.

Vows of Intent

Before you make your individual vows, I would like to solicit from you some promises which have to do with your relationship to God, for only as you rest in Him as the source of power and strength will you be able to bring to each other the vitality that will make yours a living, growing union. Do you pledge, now in God's presence and in front of your families and friends:

- To love God first in your affections,
- To think as God thinks by the serious study of Scripture,
- To respond to the workings of the Holy Spirit in your individual hearts,
- To confess all known sin to God and to be honest in admitting those failings in which you injure each other,
- To keep the vows you are now making when they are the hardest to fulfill,
- To maintain fellowship with other Christians in the church,
- To support and pray for each other with compassion, mercy and affection?

Bride and groom respond together: *With God's help, we do.*

Family-Related Activities before "The Giving of the Bride":

- **Charge to family and friends:** A brief challenge to recognize the holiness of this new union and to do all in their power to support it, holding this couple to their vows. You may also emphasize that this marks a changing in their relationships, with this couple's first responsibility now being to one another. This charge might also be after the rings and unity candle.
- **Thanks to parents:** Personal words to families and/or friends. Flowers or some other token of love and honor may be given at this point.
- **Prayer or blessing by parents:** If there are believing parents, the families/parents may gather with bride and groom for prayers together. These may be quiet, while music plays, or prayed, perhaps by the fathers, for all to hear.

Professions of Faith

Many couples want to make their Christian faith explicit, especially when there are many unbelievers present. They may repeat a creed, have a Bible text read, offer words of testimony, have the pastor summarize their testimonies, or be sure the pastor's charge includes the elements of the gospel.

Vows

Couples may wish to write their own vows, or precede or follow the traditional vows with a personal statement of love for one another. Be sure the vows are unequivocal and life-long, and that they recognize this commitment is before God. If they choose to state their vows from memory, you should have a written copy in case prompting is needed.

- _____, I love you and take you to be my wife/husband as long as God gives life to both of us. I do not know everything there is to know about love or about myself, but what I do know I want to share with you. I want to be open and honest with you in order that, through the bad times and the good times, our relationship might grow. I join you in praying that not only would our relationship with each other grow, but that our relationship with God would grow as well. Therefore, I commit myself to you in the sight of God.

• _____, today I take you to be my wife/husband. I know that God brought us together. I promise to love, honor and cherish you through all the days of our life. It is my earnest prayer that I will be able to provide for your physical needs as Christ has provided for our spiritual needs. Being one in our Lord's sight will always make me share myself completely with you. Now, _____, as we turn to the future together, whether it means prosperous or difficult times, we will continue to seek God's will for our lives together.

• *[The groom says:]* I love you, B****, and because of that love and the knowledge that God has brought us together, I take you to be my wife. I want to be open and honest with you in order that, through the bad and the good times, our relationship will grow. I do not know what the future will hold, but I will never leave you, and I promise to be a leader in seeking God's will in every area of our lives. And B****, I promise to provide the right atmosphere for you so that you may grow into all that God intended for you to be.

[The bride says:] G****, I love you, and I believe that God has brought us together and will give me the ability to love you with an unselfish and growing love. I promise to love you consistently and to be a source of encouragement and support to you. I want always to be open and honest with you and to share myself completely with you. G****, I promise never to leave you and to be faithful to you in both good and bad times and I trust you to care for me as my husband and the head of our home.

• _____, I love you. I believe that God has brought us together and will give me the ability to love you with an unselfish and growing love. I promise to love you consistently and to be a source of encouragement and support. I promise to be faithful to you in both good and bad times through all the days of our life, and I trust you to care for me as my wife/husband.

Prayer after Giving of Rings:

• Almighty God, who with holy, wise, and gracious purpose has instituted marriage, we ask you to let your blessing rest upon the covenant which G**** and B**** seal with these rings before you. Fulfill the promises that you have given to all who live according to your Word and who keep the obligations that you have ordained for the welfare of us all. Amen.

• Bless, O Lord, this ring, to be a sign of the vows by which this man and this woman have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁹

Communion – Following the Ring Ceremony, just before or after the Unity Candle.

There are differences of opinion whether or not Communion belongs in a wedding ceremony. Those arguing against suggest that since the Lord's Supper is meant to be a meal for the entire congregation, and since that is seldom practical in a wedding, it is inappropriate. On the other hand, other pastors believe that having a believing couple partake affords them an opportunity to express their faith through this very significant Christian symbol. Think through your theological approach. If Communion is used, you might include the best man and maid of honor if they are also believers, or the family members (if they are believers) as representatives of the congregation. Special music may provide a suitable background to this solemn moment. The words of institution may be spoken quietly only to those participating, as the rest of the congregation listens to the music.

Family Blessing, or Vows to Receive Children

Occasionally, someone comes to the marriage with children. Vows such as these might be useful after the wedding vows.

_____, when you marry _____ you are also making a commitment to *her/his* children. To love _____ means you want to love and care for *her/his* children as well. You have asked to make this commitment publicly so I put before you these questions:

- Do you understand that in marrying _____ you agree to love *her/his* children [use their names] even as you love *her/him*? *I do.*
- Do you promise to love and care for *her/his* children as you would your own? *I do.*
- Will you work with _____ to create a home where these children will learn about the love of God in Christ, both through your teaching and your example? *I will.*
- Will you make it your practice to pray for and with these children? *I will.*

¹⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation of The Episcopal Church, 1979), p.427.

Blessing of the Couple by Older Children²⁰

The following provides an opportunity for the couple to pledge their care for a new blended family, and for the children to bless the couple. The children gather with the couple and the pastor begins...

Today we celebrate not only a new relationship between G**** and B****, but also the beginning of new relationships between their children names—who now have a share in this marriage and will inevitably be touched by the covenant their parents enter into today. It will both complicate and enrich their lives. They, too, will have much to contribute and will need to help create a home and a way of life in which all of you will grow into the best people you can be. G**** and B****, as you give yourselves to one another in love and loyalty, do you promise always to keep room in your life together for children's names? Will you commit yourselves to respect and honor them as individuals? Do you pledge now to cherish, encourage and tenderly care for them as long as they need you? *Yes, we do.*

The children will now give their blessing to this marriage:

We (I) wish to offer to both of you our blessing and congratulations. We love you deeply and we are delighted that you have found each other. We want you to know that just as you have always loved and supported us, we promise our love and our support for your new relationship. It is our wish for you that you live fully and deeply and that your lives together will be richer and more fulfilling than either could be alone.

Prayers of Dedication

- Father, we have joined this man and woman with all the means at our disposal, but we know our frailty and so we ask you to add your unseen grace to what we do, that your Spirit may strengthen them in the inner man and hold them together when all else strives to pull them apart. Give them great delight in one another all the days of their lives. May their love only grow deeper and wider as the years grow long. May grace, mercy and peace, from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, rest upon you now and forevermore. Amen.

- Heavenly Father, you have heard these vows, as we have. Those of us who know how hard marriage can sometimes be tremble at their seriousness and import. But Lord, we also rejoice in the establishment of a home centered in Christ. We all delight in the love we see here at this altar. What a wonderful gift you have given them in this relationship!

We pray, O God, that you will strengthen the honest resolve of G**** and B**** to live up to these promises. We pray that you would help them see where they fall short, and that you will not permit them the easy excuses by which we are so prone to evade our responsibilities. We pray that you would help them to learn the deeper and longer implications of these vows that they cannot yet grasp.

Teach them, O Father, how to love well. May their love for one another be their delight and a model to us all of your love for your church. Seal and strengthen this covenant they are making before you. May their love burn like blazing fire, like the very flame of the Lord. For many waters cannot quench such love; rivers cannot wash it away.

We would ask you, our Father, to guard their steps and their hearts, to make them useful for your Kingdom, to make their home a haven of hospitality and holiness, to protect them from the craft and power of the Evil One, and to lead them to a richer knowledge of yourself through the learning center of the home.

What a privilege it is to be children of the King, what a high honor to be so wellborn. Thank you, Lord, that you shall supply all the needs of this home out of your riches in glory, that not a moment shall pass, however lonely, dark or difficult, but that you will not superintend it, and that one day, G**** and B**** will be seated together with all believers in your presence at that wedding feast for which we all yearn, the wedding supper of the Lamb. Amen.

- O, God who has so consecrated the state of matrimony that in it is represented the spiritual marriage and unity between Christ and his church; look mercifully upon these your servants, that they may love, honor, and cherish each other, and so live together in faithfulness and patience, wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and of peace; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

²⁰ Christopher Barnes

- Bless, O Lord, these your servants whom we have this day united in your love. Bestow your fatherly benediction upon them, granting unto them grace to fulfill, with pure and steadfast affection, the vow and covenant between them made. Grant them together, we beseech you, to walk in the way of righteousness and peace, that, loving and serving you with one heart and mind, all the days of their lives, they may be abundantly enriched with the tokens of your everlasting favor, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- God of love, you have established marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. The plan was yours in the first place and only with you can we work it out with joy. You have said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now our joys are doubled since the happiness of one is the happiness of the other. Our burdens are now halved since when we share them, we divide the load.

Bless this husband. Bless him as provider of food and clothing and sustain him in all the pressures and demands that these responsibilities will put upon him. May his strength be her protection, his character be her boast and her pride, and may he so live that she will find in him the haven for which the heart of a woman truly longs.

Bless this loving wife. Give her a tenderness that will make her great, a deep sense of understanding and a great faith in you. Give her that inner beauty of soul that never fades, that eternal youth that is found in holding fast the things that never age.

Teach them that marriage is not living merely for each other; it is two uniting and joining hands to serve you. Give them a great and spiritual purpose in life. May they seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and we know that then the other things shall then be given to them.

May they not expect that perfection of each other that belongs to you alone. May they minimize each other's weaknesses, be quick to praise and magnify each other's strengths and attractions, and see each other through a lover's kind and patient eyes.

Now assign them the kind of duties and experiences from your will that will bless them and develop their characters as they walk together. Give them enough tears to keep them tender, enough hurts to keep them humane, enough of failure to keep their hands clenched tightly in yours, and enough of success to make them sure they walk with God.

May they never take each other's love for granted, but always experience that breathless wonder that exclaims, "Out of all this world you have chosen me!"

When life is done and the sun is setting, may they be found then as now, still hand in hand, still thanking God for each other. May they serve you happily, faithfully, together, until at last one shall lay the other into the arms of God.

This we ask through Jesus Christ, the great lover of our soul. Amen.²¹

Pronouncement:

And now, having heard you make these pledges of your affection and take these vows of fidelity, I do, by virtue of the authority vested in me, as a minister of the gospel and in accordance with the laws of God and the State of _____, pronounce you husband and wife, no longer two, but now one, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.²²

Or...

Inasmuch as G**** and B**** have consented together to marriage, and have made their vows before God and these witness, and have symbolized their vows by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife. Those whom God has joined, let no one separate.

Presentation:

Dear friends and family, it is my honor and joy to present to you for the first time as husband and wife G**** and B**** (last name) (John and Jane Doe—rather than Mr. and Mrs. John Doe.)

A SHORT, INFORMAL CEREMONY

Occasionally, the pastor is asked to perform a very simple, brief ceremony, perhaps without music, attendants or special seating. When it is time to begin, the couple comes to stand before him.

²¹ Adapted from well-known prayer by Dr. Louis H. Evans, Sr.

²² Elmer Towns and Stan Toler, *The Year-Round Church Event Book* (Colorado Springs: Gospel Light, 1998), p. 44.

Friends, we have gathered here today to witness the marriage of G**** and B**** in the sight of God. In the beginning, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so he instituted marriage. Marriage involves separation and union. The couple leaves their dependence upon their families and unites to each other. Hear the word of God:

Read *Genesis 2:18-25* (or another appropriate text), making any comments you wish to make.

Vows

Rings

Prayer of Dedication

Pronouncement

Presentation

WEDDING CEREMONY FOR UNBELIEVERS

As noted in the introduction, many pastors will marry two unbelievers. The premarital counseling provides a wonderful opportunity to build a relationship, to help establish a home, and to share the gospel. However, some editing of the Christian ceremony is necessary. We need not expunge biblical truth or language, but some statements and promises are not appropriate. You may wish to kindly instruct this couple that while you can and will pray for their marriage, you cannot offer God's blessing upon this union as you could to those who have committed their lives to him. Explain that this is not because of your unwillingness, nor God's, but because they have not positioned themselves by faith in Christ into a place of certain blessing.

Use the Traditional Ceremony (above) substituting these elements from which salvation promises and blessings have been deleted:

Statement on Marriage

Dear family and friends: We are gathered here in the presence of God to join this man and this woman in holy marriage, which is instituted of God, regulated by his commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people. Let us, therefore, reverently remember that God has established and sanctified marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Jesus Christ has declared that a man shall leave his father and mother and cling unto his wife. Through his apostles he has instructed those who enter into this relation to cherish a mutual esteem and love; to bear with each other's infirmities and weaknesses; to comfort each other in sickness, trouble and sorrow; in honesty and industry to provide for each other, to pray for and to encourage each other.

Vows:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded wife/husband / to have and to hold from this day forward / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish till death do us part.

Prayer of Dedication (*Extemporaneous*)

- Thanks for God's gift of marriage
- Help to build this marriage on a strong foundation
- Learn to know the love of God in Christ.

Pronouncement

For inasmuch as G**** and B**** have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have pledged their faith each to the other, and have declared the same by joining hands and by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife together. Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder. [*Or* let no one separate.]

Or...

Inasmuch as G**** and B**** have consented together to marriage, and have made their vows before God and these witness, and have symbolized their vows by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife. Those whom God has joined together, let no one separate.

RENEWAL OF WEDDING VOWS

Occasionally, couples wish to renew their marriage vows, perhaps on a milestone anniversary, or because they were not believers when they were married, or simply because they want to reaffirm their commitment to one another. This may be done with one couple or several, as a special service. A renewal of vows is far less formal than a wedding. There are usually only a few guests. There would not likely be attendants, a processional, formal wear, aisle runner, rings, etc. At the appointed time, the couple meets with the pastor at the front of the church. Music can be added as the couple wishes.

Call to Worship (*All standing*)

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (*Genesis 2:20-24*).

Invocation

O Lord, we want to regard this service with great solemnity and great gladness. We know that your presence will lend both of those dimensions to what we do. G**** and B**** are not standing on the threshold of a new life together as they did ___ years ago. They do not stare with wide nor stary eyes into the future as they did the first time they came to make their vows. They come wiser and more aware of their foolishness, more deeply committed and more aware of the selfish limits of their commitment, more in love and yet more aware of how often their love has fallen short.

Lord, I pray for this couple that you would honor the renewed promises they make with reiterated promises of your own--promises of blessing and help, of wisdom and humility, and of your divine help with loving this partner to whom they have committed their lives. For Jesus' sake, Amen. (*Be seated*)

Statement on Marriage

Dear family and friends, we are gathered here in the presence of God to renew the vows of holy marriage, which is instituted of God, regulated by his commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people. Let us, therefore, reverently remember that God has established and sanctified marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Our Savior has declared that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. Through his apostles he has instructed those who enter into this relation to cherish a mutual esteem and love; to bear with each other's infirmities and weaknesses; to comfort each other in sickness, trouble and sorrow; in honesty and industry, to provide for each other; to pray for and to encourage each other; and to live together as the heirs of the grace of life.

Meditation (See Scripture suggestions in “Wedding Service” section)

Option: Sharing: The day you were married the future was a mystery. Today as you come to renew your vows you bring a history that has deepened and enriched this home. Would you share with us some of the most significant blessings of your years as a couple?

Prayer of Thanks

The pastor can pray as follows. Others may also be invited to pray, or indeed the couple themselves may wish to pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, we thank you for the wonderful ways you weave the tapestry of a marriage from the dark threads of difficult times and the bright strands of happy times. Thank you that B**** and G**** are not what they were when they began their walk together. Thank you for the tears that have kept them tender, the hurts that have kept them humane, the failures that have kept their hands clenched tightly in yours, and the successes and blessings that have made them sure they walk with God.²³

Thank you, that with all the storms which have buffeted this marriage, with all the faults each has brought to the

²³ Some ideas taken from a well-known wedding prayer by Louis Evans, Sr.

other, that they stand here hand in hand, better for having come this far together. How deeply indebted they are to you, O Lord, for sustaining and gracing their home. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Renewal of Vows

The couple turns to one another, holding hands.

G****: you have committed yourself to this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together in holy marriage, to love her, comfort her, honor and keep her and forsaking all others, keep only unto her as long as you both shall live. Do you reaffirm to her that commitment? If so, answer, "I do."

B****: you have committed yourself to this man to be your wedded husband, to live together in holy marriage, to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him and forsaking all others, keep only unto him as long as you both shall live. Do you reaffirm to him that commitment? If so, answer, "I do."

G****, would you repeat after me:

B****, I recommit myself to you as my wedded wife, / to have and to hold, / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish till death do us part, / according to God's holy plan.

B****, would you repeat after me:

G****, I recommit myself to you as my wedded husband, / to have and to hold, / for better, for worse, / for richer, for poorer, / in sickness and in health, / to love and to cherish till death do us part, / according to God's holy plan.

Ring Ceremony:

When you were married you determined to seal your vows by the giving and receiving of rings. I would like to ask that you remove your wedding ring and give it to your partner so that you can once again affirm this symbol of your commitment. These rings are the sacred symbol of your abiding love and faith. These rings are made of precious metal, so let your love be your most precious earthly possession. These rings form a perfect circle, the symbol of eternity, so may God's grace encompass you forever. These rings are the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual bond that unites two loyal hearts in endless love. These rings are no longer new. They are worn from a thousand tasks. And they have represented to others, time and again, your exclusive relationship as husband and wife.

G****, indicating your renewed commitment to your wife, place this ring on her finger, as a token of your faithfulness and your promise that you will encompass her with strength and protecting love. Repeat after me:

B****, this ring I give you / as a constant reminder / of my abiding love and commitment.

B****, indicating your renewed commitment to your husband, place this ring on his finger, as a token of your faithfulness and your promise that you will encompass him with strength and protecting love. Repeat after me:

G****, this ring I give you / as a constant reminder / of my abiding love and commitment.

Communion

If the couple are believers, you may wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. Believing guests may also be included. Introduce Communion with words like these:

Either: You began your marriage hand in hand with Christ...

Or: You have come to know Christ since your wedding day...

...You have found that your faith in Christ Jesus has become the main pillar of your home. It is Jesus who blesses marriages with his presence, just as he did when he performed his first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Therefore, we are going to celebrate his participation by sharing Communion together.

After you are served, take a moment and pray together, either silently or in whispered words between you two, thanking Jesus Christ for his salvation and his help with your marriage. In a moment, we will partake of these elements together.

Prayer of Dedication

Heavenly Father, you have heard G**** and B**** renew their vows. They know—especially now after all these years—how challenging marriage can be sometimes, and they also know how wonderful it is to walk together with one another and with Christ. Lord, we thank you for all you have done, seen and unseen, to sustain this marriage.

We pray, O God, that you will strengthen the honest resolve of G**** and B**** to live up to these promises. We pray that you would help them see where they fall short, that you will not permit them the easy excuses by which we are so prone to evade our responsibilities. We pray that you would help them to learn the deeper and longer implications of these vows that they have yet to grasp. And we ask that you will give them great joy in this covenant relationship.

I would ask you, our Father, to guard their steps and their hearts, to make them useful for the Kingdom, to make their home a haven of hospitality and holiness, to protect them from the craft and power of the Evil One, and to lead them to a richer knowledge of yourself through the learning center of the home.

What a privilege it is to be children of the King, what a high honor to be so well born. Thank you, Lord, that you shall supply all the needs of this home out of your riches in glory, that not a moment shall pass, however lonely, dark or difficult, but that you will not superintend it, and that one day, G*** and B*** can be seated together with all believers in your presence at that wedding feast for which we all yearn, the wedding supper of the Lamb. “Even so, come Lord Jesus!” Amen.

Announcement

Together you have renewed your commitment to your marriage, and have publicly declared that recommitment before God and this company. Once again, you have pledged your faith each to the other, and have evidenced that pledge by again giving and receiving rings. These vows have been witnessed in heaven as well as on earth, just as they were the first time you made them. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, I commend you for your commitment to your marriage and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I confer on you God's richest delight and blessing.

You may kiss your bride.

Presentation

I present to you Mr. and Mrs. _____ (or ‘John and Mary Doe’), whose commitment to marriage is a model and joy to us all.

Benediction

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!” Amen (*Jude 24,25*).

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ For Scripture selections, see the “Wedding Service” section.
- ✓ The couple’s children can serve as ushers or attendants. The couple may prepare simple invitations to send to their family and friends.
- ✓ Invite the couple to display pictures from their wedding.

DEDICATION OF CHILDREN

One of the Christian's dearest desires and privileges is dedicating our children to the Lord through a Service of Dedication. (Guidelines for infant baptism can be found in other service manuals.²⁴)

Only Christian parents can truly dedicate their child to the Lord. (How could those who themselves are not committed to him dedicate their children in any meaningful way?) A request for dedication provides a great opportunity for pastoral contact with the parents, including a challenge to trust Christ (if you think they are unconverted) or to renew commitments to the Lord. When there is only one believing parent only that parent should be involved in the dedication (cf. *1 Corinthians 7:14*). In advance of the service, the pastor should either visit or send a letter to the parents explaining what will happen in the service, and stating exactly what they will be asked to affirm. If you plan to use a written parents' prayer, include that as well.

This service need not be only for infants. Parents who are newer believers may not have had the opportunity when their children were young, and even believing parents occasionally simply neglected this step. As long as children are young they can be dedicated to the Lord by their parents.

When dedicating adopted children (when the adoption is public knowledge and with the parents' permission) the pastor can make note of the special gift this child is and refer to God's own adoption of all who believe as his own children.

While foster parents cannot dedicate children in their care in the same way as other parents, they can commit the child to God's special care and keeping. (Be sure there are no legal hindrances to such an act in a public service.) The service can be easily modified for the occasion.

A Dedication is usually part of a regular service. You may have several children at one time. Practically, it is wise to have the Dedication fairly early in the service since infants grow increasingly restless as time passes. You may wish to hold the child for part of the dedication but if he/she is fussy simply let the parent continue to hold the child while you place your hand on the child's head as you pray.

The pastor invites the parents to bring their child forward. (Some parents wish to bring their other children as well, that they may share in the dedication.) Once at the front, introduce each one.²⁵

Scripture

Psalm 103:17-18: But from everlasting to everlasting
The LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children--
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

Psalm 127:1-5: Unless the LORD builds the house,
its builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchmen stand guard in vain.
In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat--
for he grants sleep to those he loves.
Sons are a heritage from the LORD,
children a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are sons born in one's youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Proverbs 22:6: Train a child in the way he should go,

²⁴ Paul Engle, *Baker's Worship Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), pp.155-168.

²⁵ Contributing to this section: John Warden, Glenn Griffis

and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Matthew 18:10-14: Jesus said, "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost."

Mark 10:13-16: People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Acts 2:39: The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.

1 John 3:1: How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Introduction

This can be done extemporaneously along the lines of the following or you may read:

Friends, the family is a divine institution, God-ordained from the beginning of human history. Children are a heritage of the Lord committed by him to their parents for care, protection, and training for his glory. It is important that all parents recognize this sacred obligation and their responsibility to God in this matter, and we honor these parents for their desire to do so today.

Moses' mother, Jochebed, put her son in God's hands when she set him afloat in the Nile to preserve his life. Samuel's mother, Hannah, recognized that her child was the Lord's when she brought him to Eli, the High Priest, to be raised. And Joseph and Mary, in keeping with the Law, also brought the infant Jesus to the Temple to be consecrated to the Lord.

Now these, parents recognizing the sacredness of their responsibility, bring back to the Lord the treasure which he has entrusted to them. In so doing, they publicly acknowledge their responsibility for the nurture and admonition of this child in the ways of righteousness and godliness. These parents come with the same awareness that children belong to God and are entrusted to them for the purpose of raising and training for his will. This ceremony does not guarantee the child's eternal life. Rather, the parents are coming to the Lord and the congregation for three reasons: they present this child to the Lord for his blessing; they dedicate themselves to their task; and they ask for the help and prayers of the church.

Parents' Promises:

Option 1:

Do you solemnly promise before God and these witnesses that with God's help and guidance you will undertake to bring this little one (these little ones) to trust Jesus Christ as Savior and serve him as Lord, making use of all the helps God has given you in the family and in church? "*We do.*"

Option 2:

Do you affirm that you are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? "*I do.*"

Do you acknowledge that this dedication of your child is not a saving ordinance or act, but that your child will need to receive Christ as Savior through a personal decision when *he/she* is old enough? "*I do.*"

Do you promise, with God's help, to raise your child in the training of God's Word and the community of the church, to pray with and for *him/her*, and to live before *him/her* as Christian parents who are yourselves subject to the Lord? "*I do.*"

Do you promise to avail yourselves of all the means of grace, and to do you utmost to lead your child to trust Christ at an early age? *"I do."*

Parents' Prayer (optional):

To be prayed in unison. The pastor may pray along with them so that the congregation may hear more clearly. Print this prayer on a card so the parents can have copy from which to read.

Lord, thank you for this child you have given us. I willingly and gratefully give *him/her* back to you, dedicating *him/her* to your glory and service.

I solemnly promise before you and this congregation that with your help and guidance, and theirs, I will both model and teach God's Word to *him/her*; I will seek to introduce *him/her* to Christ; I will pray faithfully for *him/her*; and I will be sure we as a family are accountable to other believers in the church.

Heavenly Father, I trust you with this, my precious child. In Christ's name, Amen.

Pastor's Dedication Prayer:

- Our Father in heaven, we ask that you will give wisdom and grace to these parents as they face the challenges of parenting. Provide for all their needs as they serve you in this important ministry. We pray for this little one, _____. As *he/she* grows up we pray that *he/she* will know and love you and develop into a godly man/woman in whom you can be glorified. For Christ's sake, Amen.

- Lord, how grateful we are that you are a Father, that Jesus invited children to sit on his lap, and that the faith of a little child is precious to you. You have heard the promises [prayer] of these parents, solemnly and publicly dedicating this child [their children] to you. We pray for this precious little one, this jewel of your creation and love, that you would take special care of *him/her*. Protect *him/her* from the terrible threats all around, of wicked or careless people, deadly diseases, and the craft and power of the Evil One. Thank you for that wonderful promise of Jesus, "that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

Thank you that each child is unique, knit together by your own fingers, fearfully and wonderfully made. Help these parents to carefully shape and develop that unique personality you have made. May they never try to twist this child in directions you never intended *him/her* to go.

We pray that by the gentle, strong pull of your grace you would draw *him/her* early in life to the Savior. Give *him/her* a keen sense of their sinfulness and a childlike embrace of salvation. Preserve *him/her* from the wandering, prodigal days many of us have known. May *he/she* run to the arms of Jesus when *he/she* is little and walk hand in hand with him into the sunset when *he/she* is old. And may we as a church, and all the churches *he/she* will know throughout *his/her* life, provide the kind of extended family that would please you, tender and wise, prizing this little one as if *he/she* were our very own. In Christ's name, Amen.

Act of Dedication

If possible, take the child in your arms or place your hand upon his/her head, making one of the following statements:

- In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we present this child N**** to God, to his protection and to his saving and sanctifying grace.
- In the name of the Lord Jesus we present this child N**** for God's blessing, and these parents for God's equipping in the task of parenthood.
- Now, Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I present this child N****to you, to your protection and to your saving and sanctifying grace.

Congregational Promises: (Optional. If these promises and the following prayer are used, they should be provided to the congregation in print or on the screen.)

Pastor: Do you solemnly promise before God and one another that, with God's help and guidance, you will support these parents with your prayers as they seek to fulfill their responsibilities to this child, and do you promise to assist them by providing encouragement, counsel and ministries to guide them in the ways of godliness? If so answer, 'we do'. *"We do."*

Congregation's Dedication Prayer: (Optional; printed in the bulletin or worship folder)

Lord, we accept the responsibility of helping to bring this child to maturity in you. We will uphold *him/her* with our love, teach *him/her* the Word of God, encourage *him/her* when in failure and disappointment. We will be careful not to bruise this tender child with harsh words, quick judgments or cruel criticisms. This is our child, too, and we pray for the day *he/she* comes to know our Savior personally. In the name of Jesus, the Lover of the children, Amen.

Involvement of grandparents, sponsors or godparents: (Optional)

When believing grandparents are present it is delight to involve them along with the parents. In other cases, close friends of the family agree to take special spiritual responsibility for the child, in support of the parents, as sponsors or godparents. Only believers should be involved in these following ways. These statements give shape to these situations:

For Grandparents:

Psalm 103:17-18: But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children--
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

The Scripture is clear that those who raise their children in obedience to God and in righteousness carry forth a great legacy into future generations. King David of Israel was the grandson of Obed and the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz, sterling examples of trust and faith. The Gospel writers are careful to record the genealogy of our Lord, because he was influenced by his parents' forbears. The Apostle Paul commended Lois, the grandmother of his disciple, Timothy, for the faith she transmitted.

Grandparents by presence and example can influence subsequent generations for righteousness. These grandparents, _____, having raised their children to love and serve the Lord, commit themselves to support and encourage parents' names as they raise child's name.

Addressing the grandparents: Do you acknowledge before Christ and his church that you desire to live as an example of righteousness and faith to this child? "We do."

For Sponsors/Godparents:

You have a special relationship with this family that goes beyond an ordinary friendship. You have agreed to assist these parents in taking special spiritual responsibility for this child—guiding, modeling, encouraging, and praying for *him/her*. To think that someday this child may say of you, "they were like parents to me!"

Addressing the sponsors/godparents: Before God, do you commit yourselves to this child, loving *him/her* as your own, doing all you can to aid these parents in raising *him/her* in "the fear and instruction of the Lord"? "We do."

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ After the dedication prayer, carry the child up and down the aisles of the church while music (perhaps a Christian lullaby) is played or sung, allowing those in the congregation to lay hands on the child and pray a brief blessing. If there are several children, enlist the help of elders, staff or nursery workers.
- ✓ Prepare a "Certificate of Dedication" for the parents to provide a record of this occasion. Several varieties are available at Christian bookstores.
- ✓ Ask the parents to select a special verse to be read during the service—one that is especially encouraging to them, or one they would like to be a 'life verse' for the child.
- ✓ Give the meaning of the child's name with an appropriate verse.
- ✓ The pastor can write a letter to the child, to be delivered at a future birthday (e.g., the 18th), in which the pastor explains what has happened at the dedication, and the prayers offered for the child.
- ✓ Have children from the congregation read Scripture and pray as part of the service.
- ✓ Have a grandparent or members of the congregation pray for the child.

- ✓ Have the parents write on a 3x5 card what they would like to be able to say about their child's character when he/she is 21 years old.

DEDICATION OF A HOME

From time to time, Christians who have moved into a new house or apartment wish to dedicate that home to the Lord, to his protection and use. They will likely ask their pastor to be part of that dedication. You may wish to offer this service even if they do not think of it themselves. Because it is held in a home, this service is naturally more informal and conversational.

People can certainly dedicate their home to the Lord in a private time with the pastor (or alone, for that matter), but this presents a wonderful opportunity to celebrate their new home with friends. Close friends from church and work, as well as neighbors or relatives can be invited. Unbelievers can be exposed to Christian values and fellowship in this casual and unthreatening setting. The hosts might want to include a carry-in supper or refreshments in the style of a house-warming.

The pastor can discuss the following elements with the hosts to determine what would be most meaningful and comfortable for them. If songs or readings are used, a simple handout with the words should be provided to all.

Welcome

The host(s) welcomes all who have come and thanks them for coming. Explain that more than a house-warming, this occasion is being held to dedicate this home to the Lord Jesus Christ. If the pastor is not known to the guests, he should be introduced by the host.

Pastor's introductory remarks (*Extemporaneous*)

- Express delight in being asked by this family (indicate all names) to share in this special occasion.
- Explain how Jesus loves to be invited to "move in" to a new home. Remember how he loved the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and how often he went to homes to touch lives.
- Articulate the personal faith in Christ of this family and their desire to make this home the Lord's. This is not some magical rite, but a way this family demonstrates their desire that the Lord control all aspects of their lives.
- If there is some unknown evil attached to this house, due to past sins or the Devil's work, this service is an opportunity to cleanse and consecrate this property to God alone.

Dedication Statement

The pastor invites the host or host family to the front. The following statements may be shared by all in the family old enough to read and understand. Make assignments ahead of time. Little children might be present and even given a simple line to memorize. Several different dedication statement options are given here. The pastor begins by explaining that the hosts will now make statements dedicating their home.

Option 1:²⁶

All family members: In gratitude to God, we dedicate our home.

The following lines read by various family members:

- To be a place where God is honored in family worship, prayer and godly living.
- To be a place where God's Word is enjoyed, taught and lived.
- To be a place where family and friends can find refuge and encouragement from the temptations and pressures of the world.
- To be a place where others will see God's love demonstrated in our love.
- To be a place where Christian hospitality is extended in Jesus' name.

Head of household: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (*Joshua 24:15*)

Option 2:

Pastor: It is God alone who grants us security in dwelling.

Family member:

Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD will hear when I call to him.

²⁶ Submitted by Jerry Foote

In your anger do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.
Offer right sacrifices
and trust in the LORD.
Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?"
Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.
You have filled my heart with greater joy
than when their grain and new wine abound.
I will lie down and sleep in peace,
for you alone, O LORD,
make me dwell in safety. (*Psalm 4:3-8*)

Pastor: Furthermore the Scriptures call for godly homes to show hospitality.

Family member: "Then Jesus said to his host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'" (*Luke 14:12-14*)

Family member: "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." (*1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2*)

Option 3:²⁷

A chosen guest reads *Psalm 127* – "Unless the LORD builds the house..."

Family members reading alternately:

- We humbly dedicate this house with deep gratitude to God for leading us here to make a home.
- We dedicate the doors of this house to hospitality and security.
- We dedicate the windows that our house may be lighted and cheerful and that we may look out on others with kindness and neighborly love.
- We dedicate our furniture and all our household goods, reminding ourselves again that Jesus said one's "life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."
- We dedicate all those things that entertain us to wholesome and holy use.
- We dedicate this home to loving relationships, committing ourselves not only to loving *much*, but also to loving *well*.
- We dedicate this home to work and leisure, to serious thinking and heartfelt laughter, to music and rest.

All family members: We dedicate this home—*our* home—to God's service, the unity of God's Kingdom, the building up of the saints, and the salvation of the lost.

Pastor: (from a printed copy provided to the guests): For the gracious way you have led this family and provide this house [apartment] to be a home for them...

Guests: We thank you, loving Father.

Pastor: For the salvation that you have brought to this home...

Guests: We thank you, loving Father.

Pastor: And we now ask your blessing upon this house and this family.

Guests: For the nurturing of a Christian family, to the Christian witness in this neighborhood, to the practice of Christian hospitality, for the glory of God and the advancement of the Kingdom of his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Cleansing Prayer (this may be done privately, or with only Christian friends):

Scripture: *Luke 11:17-26* – Jesus' power over evil spirits

²⁷ Paul Renovitch

Prayer: (*Extemporaneous*)

- Recognize that diabolical powers can and do invade places where they have been invited by word or action.
- Thank God for his power over all such unclean spirits, through our Savior Jesus Christ.
- Recognize the position of these believers in Christ, and thus, their security and safety in him (cf. *Colossians 2:9-10, 15*)
- Commit the house and all the things and people in it to the Lord.

You may wish to go from room to room with prayers of both blessing and protection, sharing the praying with other believers.

The Blessing

Pastor and Guests: (addressing the host family. If it is comfortable to do so, invite the guests to extend their hand toward them, in keeping with a benediction.)

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace. (*Numbers 6:24-26*)

Or...

Peace to this house and to all who enter here.

“By wisdom a house is built,
and through understanding it is established;
through knowledge its rooms are filled
with rare and beautiful treasures.” (*Proverbs 24:3-4*)

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Songs of praise or dedication can be interspersed. Use a favorite song of each family member.
- ✓ Other Scripture:
Deuteronomy 11:18-21 – “Write [these commands] on the doorframes of your houses”
Psalms 127 – “Unless the LORD builds the house...”
Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders
Luke 10:38-41 – Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha
John 14:23 – Christ promises to make his home with those who love and obey him
- ✓ Move from room to room, praying especially for the activities that room represents. Guests might read verses that come to mind or offer short prayers.
- ✓ A Guest Book would be a wonderful gift from the pastor or church to mark this occasion. Even a blank book will do. Ask all guests to sign it and to include a greeting or word of encouragement. Have someone take pictures that can be added to the book later.
- ✓ Guests might be invited to share different blessings they have received as a result of knowing this family, or to mention qualities of Christ they have seen in these friends.
- ✓ Distribute copies of the little pamphlet, *My Heart, Christ's Home*, by Robert Boyd Munger, to each guest. They can be purchased at a Christian bookstore, or downloaded from the internet.

FAMILY HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Pastors are often called upon to “bring a word” at all kinds of special times—both in church services on various holidays and in more personal, family times. Sometimes, like on Mother’s Day, a pastor may shape much of a worship service around that theme, while other times, such as a graduation reception, he may simply be called on to pray or make a few comments. The Scripture passages suggested with the following special days will not only help in knowing, on short notice, what to read, but also give ideas for prayers and comments.

Birthday

Psalm 22:10 – “From birth I was cast upon you...”
Psalm 71:5-8, 17-18 – “From birth I have relied on you...”
Psalm 90:1-2, 12, 17 – “Teach us to number our days aright...”
Proverbs 23:22-25 – “...he who has a wise son delights in him...”
Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 – “There is a time for everything...”

Graduation

1 Kings 3:4-15 (2 Chronicles 1:6-12) - Solomon asks for wisdom
[Many texts in Proverbs would be appropriate]
Proverbs 3:1-18 – “My son, do not forget my teaching...”
Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders
Mark 10:17-31 – The rich young ruler
Luke 12:13-21 – The parable of the rich fool
Philippians 2:19-24 – Paul’s admiration for Timothy
Hebrews 12:1-3 – “Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...”

Wedding Anniversary

Psalm 127 – “Unless the LORD builds the house...”
Psalm 128 – “Blessed are all who fear the LORD...”
Proverbs 5:18-19 – “May you rejoice in the wife of your youth...”
Proverbs 12:4; 18:22; 19:14, 31:10-31 – God’s gift of a wife
Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 – “There is a time for everything...”
Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 – “Two are better than one...”
Song of Solomon 8:6-7 – “Many waters cannot quench love...”
Ephesians 5:21-28 – Paul’s instructions for wives and husbands

Mother’s Day (second Sunday in May)

1 Samuel 1:21-28 – Hannah dedicates Samuel to the Lord
Psalm 113:9 – The barren woman is blessed with children
Proverbs 1:8; 6:20 – “Do not forget your mother’s instruction”
Proverbs 23:22-25 – The delight of having righteous children
Proverbs 31:10-31 – The virtuous woman
Romans 16:13 – A woman who had been like a mother to Paul
2 Timothy 1:5 – The faith of Timothy’s mother and grandmother

Child’s Birthday or Children’s Day (second Sunday in June)

Genesis 21:1-7 – The birth of Isaac in Abraham and Sarah’s old age
Exodus 12:26-27 – Telling children the meaning of Passover
Deuteronomy 5:16 – “Honor your father and mother...”
Deuteronomy 6:1-9 – Impressing God’s commands upon children
Psalm 78:1-7 – Telling the next generation what God has done
Psalm 103:13-14 – “As a father has compassion on his children...”
Proverbs 8:2; 20:11; 22:6; 23:22-25 – Counsel for children
Matthew 18:1-6 – Children are great in the kingdom of heaven
Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17 – Jesus blessing the children
Ephesians 6:1-3 (Colossians 3:20) – “Children, obey your parents”

Father's Day (third Sunday in June)

Judges 13:8 – Manoah prays for guidance in raising Samson
1 Kings 2:1-4 – David's last counsel to Solomon
1 Chronicles 29:19 – David's prayer that Solomon would be devoted to the Lord
Job 1:4-5 – Job's spiritual concern for his children
[Many texts in Proverbs would be appropriate]
Proverbs 3:1-18 – "My son, do not forget my teaching..."
Proverbs 4:1-10 – A father teaches the value of wisdom
Proverbs 23:22-25 – The delight of having righteous children
Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21 – Bring up your children in the "training and instruction of the Lord"
1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 – The manner of a godly father

Grandparents' Day (second Sunday in September)

Leviticus 19:32 – Show respect for the elderly
1 Samuel 2:2-5 – Samuel's godly reputation in old age
Psalms 71:17-18 – The benefits of lifelong commitment to the Lord
Psalms 128:5-6 – The blessing of seeing grandchildren
Psalms 145:4-7 – "One generation will commend your works to another"
Proverbs 13:22 – Leaving an inheritance for grandchildren
Proverbs 16:31 – The crown of a righteous life
Proverbs 17:6 – Grandchildren are "a crown to the aged"
Proverbs 23:22-25 – The delight of having righteous children
Isaiah 46:4 – God will sustain even in old age
Titus 2:3-5 – The older teaching the younger

Launching a new venture

Genesis 41:37 – The Spirit of God in Joseph's plans
Esther 4:14 – "...for such a time as this"
Psalms 20 – "May he... make all your plans succeed"
Psalms 127 – "Unless the LORD builds the house..."
Proverbs 12:5 – "The plans of the righteous are just"
Proverbs 14:22 – "Those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness"
Proverbs 16:1,3,9; 19:21; 20:18; 21:5,30 – Counsel about plans
Ecclesiastes 9:10 – Work with all your might
Isaiah 32:7-8 – The noble person
Micah 6:8 – "What does the LORD require of you?"
Matthew 7:24-27 – The wise and foolish builders
Luke 14:28-30 – A parable of spiritual planning

Retirement

[See references under Grandparents Day]
Job 29:7-25 – Job's sterling reputation
Isaiah 32:8 – The noble person
Matthew 23:12 – "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted"
1 Corinthians 3:7 – It is God's work, not ours, that matters most
2 Timothy 4:6-8 – "I have fought the good fight..."

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

Seldom is there a more important time for a pastor to demonstrate the tender love and care of Christ, the Good Shepherd, than at funerals. By the very nature of their unexpectedness, funerals demand the pastor trust God for words and actions that truly minister to the bereaved and honor the deceased. At such times people are unusually open to the great life and death issues our faith answers, and rarely can a pastor make such an investment in a family. Being personal and *human* is far more important than maintaining formality. Be especially attentive and available to those who grieve.

Generally, a funeral is quite a brief service following a simple structure. If the service is at a funeral home approximately 30 minutes is appropriate, while a service in the church may be longer given the addition of hymns or special music.

The obituary, which is a brief summary of the person's life and death, and eulogy, which is tribute to the person, are combined. This time provides an opportunity to acknowledge the survivors by name and share personal stories and recollections about the person who has died. In the day or two before the funeral ask the loved ones what they appreciated most, what their favorite stories are, and what they will most remember. For the believer, speak of his or her faith and place in the church. When survivors have very painful memories, tactfully acknowledge that while not all the memories are good, we do want to respectfully remember this person's life nonetheless. Speak only what you know is fact. Otherwise, the family may know other sides to the individual being lauded and think you a liar or naïve.

The funeral sermon is usually a brief meditation on a text of Scripture. For the believer, it is essential to celebrate our hope of eternal life in Christ. In addition to the Bible texts listed below, passages with rich biblical metaphors—our heavenly home, the wedding supper of the Lamb, white robes, etc.—make for simple, vivid preaching. In the case of a person who is not known to be a believer the pastor may simply speak of God's provision for death through Christ. One approach is, "If _____ could return to be with us today, one thing I am certain he/she would say to us is, 'you must know Christ!'" The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) is a useful text in that the pastor can speak of the heart attitude God requires without implying one way or the other the spiritual condition of the deceased. The sermon can also focus on God's strength and help available to the grieving who trust him (e.g. Psalm 46).

The funeral service may be held at the church or the funeral home, though for a church member, the church seems to be especially appropriate. In this matter, as well as others, funeral customs differ from one community to another. A funeral director who knows the customs and options that are appropriate will be your best help. (Occasionally, the pastor must stand up to a funeral director who is insensitive to the wishes of the family or to the customs of the church, but usually this person is a valuable ally.)

Sometimes, when the body has been cremated or buried elsewhere what the pastor actually conducts is a memorial service rather than a funeral. The format remains the same.

It is not necessary to have music at a funeral. Believers will often appreciate singing songs of comfort and hope but unchurched people may stumble through the songs. Music can also be very emotional for the bereaved. Funeral homes often do not have instruments to accompany music.

Each funeral is unique. The following material is meant to assist the pastor by suggestion only. The order of service and the arrangement of its component parts will vary according to the requirements of the occasion and the mind of the pastor. The pastor should work with the family in planning the service. The family may request favorite songs or Scripture passages, or wish to have certain individuals participate in reading and tributes. It is quite common for the family to request an open sharing time—a chance for individuals to make extemporaneous, personal comments. This poses a challenge for the pastor. For one thing, people may express things that are contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Another is that people can go on and on, mindless of the time. You may recommend to the family that you tell the audience, "We're going to take __ minutes for those who would like to make a brief comment about N****."

The pastor should dress formally, usually in a dark suit.

A SERVICE FOR ONE KNOWN AS A BELIEVER

Prelude

Invocation

- Eternal God, our heavenly Father, who loves us with an everlasting love, and can turn the shadow of death into the morning: help us now to wait upon you with reverent and believing hearts. In the silence of this hour speak to us of eternal things, that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we may have hope, and be lifted above our darkness and distress into the light and peace of your presence, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- *Extemporaneous Prayer:*
 - Recognize God's love, care, wisdom
 - Give thanks for the Christian's hope of eternal life in Christ
 - Give thanks for memories of the deceased
 - Invoke God's help and a sense of his presence in this service.

Welcome

If you are unknown to the guests, introduce yourself. On behalf of the family, thank those who have come.

Song (*Optional: congregation or soloist*)

Scripture

Psalm 23: The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,
 he leads me beside quiet waters,
 he restores my soul.
 He guides me in paths of righteousness
 for his name's sake.
 Even though I walk
 through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I will fear no evil,
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff,
 they comfort me.
 you prepare a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies.
 you anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.
 Surely goodness and love will follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 61:1-5: Hear my cry, O God;

listen to my prayer.
 From the ends of the earth I call to you,
 I call as my heart grows faint;
 lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
 For you have been my refuge,
 a strong tower against the foe.
 I long to dwell in your tent forever
 and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.
 For you have heard my vows, O God;
 you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

Lamentations 3:19-26, 31-33:

I remember my affliction and my wandering,
 the bitterness and the gall.
 I well remember them,
 and my soul is downcast within me.
 Yet this I call to mind
 and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."
The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD...
For men are not cast off
by the Lord forever.
Though he brings grief, he will show compassion,
so great is his unfailing love.
For he does not willingly bring affliction
or grief to the children of men.

Isaiah 57:1-2: The righteous perish,
and no one ponders it in his heart;
devout men are taken away,
and no one understands
that the righteous are taken away
to be spared from evil.
Those who walk uprightly
enter into peace;
they find rest as they lie in death.

Isaiah 57:15: For this is what the high and lofty One says--
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
"I live in a high and holy place,
but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite.

John 11:25-26: Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 14:1-6: Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

2 Corinthians 5:1-2: Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling...

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still

alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Revelation 1:17-18: When I saw him [the glorified Christ], I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Revelation 21:1-4: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Other Scripture

There are, of course, scores of hope-filled and comforting texts in Scripture. These are but a few more: Job 19:25-26; Psalms 16, 39, 57, 90, 42, 46, 130; Matthew 11:28-30; John 11:17-27; 14:27; Romans 8; 14:7-9; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 4:17,18; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Hebrews 12:1-3; Revelation 7:9-17; 22:1-5.

Song (*Optional; congregation or soloist*)

Obituary & Eulogy

Beyond the pastor's comments, special prepared tributes from friends or family may be included at this point. With the permission of the family, extemporaneous words of appreciation and remembrance may be invited from those gathered. (See Introduction for more guidelines.)

Sermon (*See Introduction*)

Optional: Affirmation of Faith (such as The Apostles' Creed. See "General Worship Resources")

Prayer

- Lord and Master, you are touched with the feeling of our sorrows. Fulfill your promise that you will not leave your people comfortless but will come to them. Reveal your tender love and grace to your grieving servants and cause them to hear you say, "I am the resurrection and the life." Help them, O Lord, to turn to you in true faith, that, finding now the comfort of your presence, they may also have a sure confidence in you for all that is to come; until the day breaks and these shadows flee away. In your name, O Lord our God and Savior, we pray. Amen.
- *Extemporaneous Prayer:*
 - Reflect on the message just preached, applying its truths to the listeners
 - Thank God again for the memory of this loved one and for the promise of our hope in Christ
 - Ask for God's ongoing comfort

Benediction

- May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (*Philippians 4:7*)
- May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (*2 Corinthians 13:14*)
- May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon you. (*Philippians 4:7*)

- May the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (*1 Peter 5:10,11*)
- Now may the Lord Jesus Christ be with you, for he came to bind up the brokenhearted, to comfort all who mourn and to provide for those who grieve. He has promised to grant you a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Go in his peace. Amen. (*Isaiah 61:1-3*)
- This is God's word for you: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." (*Isaiah 43:2-3*)
- May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (*Hebrews 13:20-21*)

Alternate Benedictions may be drawn from *1 Peter 1:3-4; Romans 8:38-39; Jude 24-25.*

At the conclusion of the service the funeral director will give instructions to congregation and guide the dismissal of family members.

Postlude

It is customary for the pastor to lead the pallbearers to the funeral coach, and from the funeral coach to the burial site. Check with the funeral director for local customs.

THE GRAVESIDE SERVICE (INTERMENT) OF A BELIEVER

This is a very brief service at the graveside or mausoleum. Occasionally, this service is not actually held at the graveside (due to inclement weather, for instance, or the difficulty the elderly may have in walking to the gravesite). This element is sometimes incorporated at the conclusion of the funeral itself, so that both 'services' happen in one place and time.

The pastor shall precede the pallbearers to the grave. After the casket has been positioned over the grave, at the signal of the funeral director, the pastor shall stand at the head or behind the casket to perform the committal.

Scripture (see selections above)

Committal

- Forasmuch as it has pleased our heavenly Father in his wise providence to take unto himself our beloved N****, we therefore commit *his/her* body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. He will change this decaying body and fashion it anew in the likeness of his own glorious resurrection body. He will do this by unleashing his mighty power by which he is able to bring all things under his dominion.
- [*Especially in the event of an 'untimely' death*] For reasons beyond our understanding it has pleased our wise and good heavenly Father to take to himself this precious loved one and friend, N****. Therefore, we surrender *him/her* to the Lord who gave *him/her* to us and to whom *he/she* was dedicated in life and in death. Here we

commit *his/her* body to the earth, knowing that N****does not lie in this tomb, but rather is in the presence of God.

In letting N**** go, we affirm our confidence in the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who has promised to give *him/her* a new resurrection body as different from this as the flower is from the seed, and we rest in the confidence that all who know Christ will be reunited forever in heaven, where there are no more tears, where the atmosphere resounds with praise, and where God himself is the light. Amen.

(During the phrase, "earth to earth" etc. the pastor may sprinkle dirt upon the casket. Another option is to use flowers. Check on local customs.)

Benediction (see above)

A SERVICE FOR ONE NOT KNOWN TO BE A BELIEVER

(See comments in Introduction)

Prelude

Invocation

O Lord, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. We humbly ask you to look down upon our sorrowing hearts, and be gracious unto us. Help all who mourn to cast every care upon you and find the comfort they so desperately need through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Song *(Optional: congregation or soloist)*

Scripture

Psalm 90: 1-6, 12-17: Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.

Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn men back to dust,
saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."

For a thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.

You sweep men away in the sleep of death;
they are like the new grass of the morning--
though in the morning it springs up new,
by evening it is dry and withered...

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Relent, O LORD! How long will it be?
Have compassion on your servants.

Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.

May your deeds be shown to your servants,
your splendor to their children.

May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us;
establish the work of our hands for us--
yes, establish the work of our hands.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14: There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

Other Scripture

Select texts which deal with comfort for the living rather than the destiny of the unbelieving, such as *Isaiah 40:28-31* and *Isaiah 41:10* (see below).

Song (Optional: congregation or soloist)

Obituary & Eulogy

Sermon (See Introduction)

Prayer

- Our eternal God, the consolation and support of all who will trust in you, grant your sustaining strength to these bereaved ones who sorrow today. Enable us to look beyond this earthly life, and help us to see the things that are eternal. Grant that we may follow with true faith where you lead, so that when our days are finished upon this earth, we shall find our eternal home with you. Be gracious unto us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.
- Lord God, this loss is painful, especially for (family members). Thank you for the good memories *they/we* have of N****. Thank you, too, that you are a God of comfort. I pray you would help these who grieve to turn to you and to receive the consolation of your Spirit and your Word. May Christ be real and personal to each one. We would not ask that they be spared from grieving, but that you would be a balm and medicine for their sad hearts. May you work in them what is pleasing to you. Through Christ, Amen.

Benediction

Postlude

THE GRAVESIDE SERVICE (INTERMENT) OF AN UNBELIEVER

Scripture

Isaiah 40:28-31: Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 41:10: So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Committal

Forasmuch as the spirit of this loved one, N****, has departed, with cherished memories we therefore commit *his/her* body to its resting place, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, knowing that the end of all flesh is the grave; but that in God is our eternal hope.

Prayer

Benediction

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE FUNERAL OF A CHILD

Scripture

Job 1:21-22: Job, that heartbroken saint, said,
“Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised.”
In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

2 *Samuel 12:16-23* – David's prayer vigil over his son by Bathsheba and his trust in God upon the child's death.
“...Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

Psalms 103:13-18: As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
As for man, his days are like grass,
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children--
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

Matthew 18:1-5: At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.”

Matthew 18:10-14: Jesus said, “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”

Mark 10:13-16: People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Sermon

If the child was too young to have made a personal commitment to Christ, the issue of the little one’s eternal destiny should be addressed. Many pastors have considerable confidence that such little ones will be saved, not on the basis of their innocence (because they were born in sin), but because of God’s grace applied to them in response to childlike faith (cf. Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14; Mark10:13-16). If your convictions do not allow you to give a clear word of hope, be as hopeful and encouraging as you can possibly be. (Systematic theology books will help you understand the issues and key texts.) The thought that this little one might not be saved would be overwhelming to parents. If the child had made a profession of faith, that childlike trust should be clearly celebrated.

Prayer:

- Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the love that cares for us in life and watches over us in death. May we in faith and hope give back to you the life of N****, which in love was given us. We bless your name for our Savior’s joy in little children and for the assurance that of such is the kingdom of heaven. We believe that in death as in life they are in his holy keeping.

In our sorrow make us strong to commit ourselves and those we love to your never-failing care. In our perplexity may we trust where we cannot understand, knowing that the eternal God is our refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. In our loneliness give us gratitude for our memories, and may we never forget that our God, who is a Father himself, will keep that which we have committed unto him until the eternal morning breaks. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- Heavenly Father, is there any grief like this grief? Any sorrow so deep as this sorrow? Our hearts are filled with questions you do not seem to answer, and a pain so profound we wonder if even you can touch it. Yet, O God, where else can we turn at such a time as this but to you?

Lord, we are surely grateful for the life of N****. The joy and wonder this *boy/girl* brought us all, but especially *his/her* family, was one of your sweetest gifts. Settle those memories deeply within *his/her* loved ones and give us all grateful hearts, even in our sorrow.

Father, we are grateful, too, for the confidence we have that N**** is safe in your care, not because of *his/her* innocence or righteousness, but on the merits of Christ’s death and *his/her* childlike faith. Thank you for the confident hope we have of reunion in heaven with you.

We do not pray, Lord, that you would erase the grief, but that you would apply some spiritual balm for sorrowing souls, some divine medicine for broken hearts. Though you may not now tell us why this has happened, we pray that you would reveal your love and faithfulness at this most difficult time. Give scriptural consolation. Give friends who listen well, and wait patiently when these who grieve are silent or angry. Give rest for weary minds and bodies. And, in time, bring a measure of healing to this deepest of all wounds. In the name of Jesus, the lover of the children, Amen.

- *Extemporaneous Prayer:* [Draw ideas from the prayer above.]

Committal

- In infinite wisdom and love our heavenly Father has received unto himself the spirit of this little child, N****. We therefore tenderly commit *his/her* body to its resting place in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- For reasons beyond our understanding it has pleased our wise and good heavenly Father to take to himself this precious child, N****. Therefore, we surrender *him/her* to the Lord who gave *him/her* to us. Here we commit *his/her* body to the earth, knowing that N**** does not lie in this cemetery, but is safe in the presence of our heavenly Father.

In letting N**** go, we affirm our confidence in the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who has promised to give *him/her* a new resurrection body as different from this as the seed is from the flower, and we rest in the confidence that all who know Christ will be reunited forever in heaven, where there are no more tears, where the atmosphere resounds with song, and where God himself is the light. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE FUNERAL OF ONE WHO HAS COMMITTED SUICIDE

Recognize the tumultuous feelings of those assembled. If the deceased was a believer, reassure the bereaved of God's strong grip on the redeemed for Jesus' sake. If the deceased was not saved, focus on the comfort and grace of God for the living, while honoring the memory of the one who has died.

Scripture

2 Samuel 18:33: We identify with David upon hearing of the death of his beloved son, Absalom: "The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!'"

Job 3:20-26: Job despaired of life, too, though by God's grace he did not surrender to that hopelessness. Here are some of his feelings:

"Why is light given to those in misery,
and life to the bitter of soul,
to those who long for death that does not come,
who search for it more than for hidden treasure,
who are filled with gladness
and rejoice when they reach the grave?
Why is life given to a man
whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?
For sighing comes to me instead of food;
my groans pour out like water.
What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.
I have no peace, no quietness;
I have no rest, but only turmoil."

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 12:13: Solomon also wrestled with meaninglessness, as recorded in Ecclesiastes:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!"
says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."

Yet after all his struggles, Solomon concluded,
"Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man."

Scripture for a suicide victim known to be a believer

Psalm 103:8-14: The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

Romans 8:28-39: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hebrews 4:14-16: Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ There are many more helpful resources available than we can provide here. Consult *The Book of Common Prayer* and other service manuals for additional prayers, readings, quotes, Scripture texts and music ideas.
- ✓ Offer to have an informal family-only service the night before the funeral. It can be a more relaxed time of Scripture reading, a brief pastoral word of encouragement and comfort, sharing among the family members, and prayer. This is especially sweet to a family who are usually separated by many miles.
- ✓ If the deceased was a believer, use his/her Bible in the service, noting passages marked, notes, clippings, letters, etc. Use it as you preach.
- ✓ If a believer, share how he/she came to Christ.
- ✓ See "Ministering to the Bereaved."
- ✓ In *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part II*, by John Bunyan, this passage describes the passing of a faithful saint, Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. It is a wonderful quote for the funeral of a believer.

“After this it was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant-for-truth was sent for by a summons... When he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then said he, ‘I am going to my Father’s house: and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles, who will now be my rewarder.’ When the day that he must go home was come, many accompanied him to the river-side, into which, as he went down, he said, ‘O death where is thy sting?’ And as he went down deeper, he cried, ‘O grave, where is thy victory?’ So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”

PART V: SHEPHERDING SERVICES BY PASTORS

ANOINTING THE SICK

The practice of anointing the sick with oil is drawn from James 5:13-18: “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

Obviously, each pastor needs to work out his own understanding of the details of this text, but it is clear that God is giving us a pattern that we can and should follow. Some observations on this text:

- The sick person is to extend the invitation to the elders to pray. This is an act of faith. However, the sick or suffering person may not be aware of this text and the pastor should explain it. A believer may choose not to pursue this course. One reason might be that, like Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, they have determined this illness is permitted by God to show his strength in weakness.
- One reason the elders are called might be that sick people often find their own faith flagging and their perspective growing cloudy. Elders, who are presumably strong in faith and insight, can pray more confidently and wisely. If the present elders of the church are not all available to pray, ask former elders to join you, or if necessary, others who demonstrate these godly qualities.
- Elders do need to prepare for this time, purifying their own hearts and fortifying their faith in Scripture and prayer. It is not merely their office that brings potency to their prayers, but their righteousness and faith.
- It is not clear what the anointing with oil means. Some suggest it may have been a medicinal purpose (cf. Luke 10:34). But in Mark 6:13 it preceded a direct healing when no medicine was needed. In any event, it can be used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit’s special favor and touch upon this person, and should be explained to them that way. A small vial of olive oil will do. You can purchase such a bottle at a Christian bookstore, or bring one of your own from home.
- According to v.16, the healing is predicated on confession of sin. It is possible that one reason this person is sick is sin, or that the sickness has prompted sins such as bitterness or anger. Of course, Job’s story reminds us that not all sickness is caused by sin. In preparing the sick person for the visit of the elders, tell him or her that they will be asked if they have unconfessed or unresolved sins. This is a very serious and pivotal matter, which the person should consider carefully. The person’s failure to speak candidly apparently can undermine God’s response. However, the person may also have honestly examined his or her heart and honestly not be aware of any unconfessed sin.
- It appears we have an unequivocal promise of healing if these conditions are met. However, in keeping with the broader teaching of Scripture, it seems God may answer these prayers in one of the following ways:
 - If sin caused the sickness and the sin is forgiven through this process, healing can begin immediately. Sometimes the freedom of conscience and peace of mind that God gives after this anointing simply frees the body to heal.
 - God may delay healing, as he did with Job, perhaps for the benefit of the sick person, but it may also be as a witness to the unseen powers who have challenged the genuineness of the person’s faith, as Satan did Job’s.
 - God may speak to this person as he did to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, clearly indicating that this condition will *not* pass, at least for the time being, in order that God’s power might be displayed in weakness. To *know* this is a therapy in itself, for often the hardest thing for the sick is wondering if there is something more they should be doing to secure God’s healing.
 - God may heal directly—within the next moments or hours—or hasten the natural healing process through normal medical care. This really does happen after such anointings and should be prayed for with confidence.

The anointing

The elders shall gather privately with the sick person, in the hospital or home, or even in a quiet room at church (perhaps after a service when it is easiest to arrange a meeting). It is probably fine to allow a family member or close Christian friends to be present if the sick person requests it but remember, he or she will be asked about matters of personal sin.

- Be sure all have been introduced.
- Offer a brief prayer asking God's help and guidance in this time.
- Read James 5:13-18 making observations such as those above.
- Ask the sick person to describe in particular what is wrong, and why they want the elders to pray.
- In keeping with v.16, ask the person if there is any sin they need to confess. If so, listen carefully and probe to be sure all the person needs to say has been said. Wise elders may give counsel to the person at this point, but that is not necessarily what is called for on this occasion.
- Assure the one confessing that his or her sins are forgiven in Jesus' name. John 20:23 conveys just such authority: "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." You may also read Psalm 103:8-13 and/or 1 John 1:9-10.
- Anoint the sick person with oil, dipping your finger in the oil and making a cross on her forehead. Say, "In obedience to the Scriptures, I anoint you with oil in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Physician of our souls."
- Have the elders gather around the sick person (who is seated, if possible, in a chair in the center of the room), lay hands on them, and pray conversationally. Instruct the elders to pray not only about the sickness directly but to be sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit, who may direct prayer about other matters in the person's life as well. Be sure it is clear who will close the time of prayer.
- At the conclusion a benediction would be appropriate, touching the sick person as you speak.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (*1 Peter 5:10-11*)

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (*Jude 24-25*)

- Be sure to follow up this time with a phone call or visit to see how things are going.

MINISTERING TO THE SICK

Visiting the sick, whether in the hospital or home, is a special opportunity for the pastor. Bonds are formed in these times that will help the pastor disciple this parishioner in better times. While the pastor is not necessarily more effective in visiting than others in the church, the fact remains that, at least in the mind of our people, a visit from the pastor is indeed different, being invested with something almost priestly. For his part, the pastor has the holy opportunity to learn some of the spiritual lessons of suffering vicariously through his people. As we bring Scripture to their pain, we learn more about both pain and the Bible, lessons that will help us, in turn, to minister to others more wisely and compassionately.

Visiting the hospital or nursing home:

You never know quite what to expect as you enter a hospital. Will the patient be available? What will the mood be? Has good or bad news just come? Who might be in the next bed? What secret concerns are weighing on their mind? How is the family reacting? Is this person a believer or an unbeliever? Consequently, we must be prayerfully ready for anything. Jesus told his disciples not to be concerned about what they would say when hauled before hostile rulers. If that is so, how much more can we trust him when we are brought into unexpected situations in caring for his lambs?

Nonetheless, it is good to give thought before entering a room to what you might read from the Word, and how you might pray for this individual. You will certainly pray for health, but as a physician of the soul, you want to discern what work God might be doing where no M.D. can see. Therefore, be sensitive to thoughts that come as you pray, and to comments from the patient's family or friends.

Many hospitals provide a special room for pastors to wait or prepare, and identification badges which will generally open the doors of the hospital wards almost any time of day or night. With the exception of the maternity ward, the pastor is not usually bound by visiting hours (unless the patient is very critical). Hospitals are prohibited by law from giving out patient information. However, a brief stop at the nurses' station, identifying yourself as the patient's pastor, may give you some insight into the condition of the patient before going into the room. It is also good to ask if this is a good time to visit. If the door is closed, the nurse can help you know whether the patient just wants quiet, or if some personal ministrations are in progress for which you should wait. If a doctor should come while you are with the patient, defer immediately to them (unless you are in the midst of praying), leaving the room until the doctor is finished.

Usually it is not necessary for you to spend a long time with a patient for the visit to be valuable and meaningful. While small talk is useful for breaking the ice, do not hesitate to ask how this trial is affecting the person, especially their soul. Ask what they find themselves thinking about, and how they pray. Simply asking them what they would like you to pray for might yield unexpected clarity.

A simple plan is to visit a few minutes, read Scripture, pray and leave. There are many passages of Scripture which are of comfort and encouragement to the suffering, but do not feel that you can only read such texts. Especially if the person is going through a long stay, more general passages are fine. For example, you might read the text from which you preached last Sunday and highlight some of the main thoughts in your message. Or read what you have been considering in your own personal devotions. Each pastor will develop his own pharmacy of favorite texts to read on these occasions, but here are some suggestions:

Scripture

Psalm 40:1-5 - "I waited patiently for the LORD..."

Psalm 41:1-3 - "Blessed is he who has regard for the weak..."

Psalm 46 - "God is our refuge and strength..."

Psalm 57 - "Have mercy on me, O God..."

Psalm 61:1-5 - "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer..."

Psalm 62 - "My soul finds rest in God alone..."

Psalm 63:1-8 - "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you..."

Psalm 91 - "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High..."

Psalm 121 - "I lift up my eyes to the hills..."

Psalm 130 - "Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD..."

Psalm 131 - "My heart is not proud, O LORD..."

Isaiah 26:3 - "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind..."

Isaiah 40:27-31 - "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength"

Isaiah 41:10 - "So do not fear, for I am with you;"

Isaiah 43:1-7 - "Fear not, for I have redeemed you..."

Jeremiah 29:11 - "I know the plans I have for you..."

Matthew 11:28-29 - "Come to me, all you who are weary..."

Romans 5:1-5 - "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God... we also rejoice in our sufferings..."

Romans 8:28-39 - "And we know that in all things God works..."

Philippians 4:6-9 - "Do not be anxious about anything..."

1 Peter 5:10-11 - "The God of all grace... after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you..."

James 1:2-8 - "Consider it pure joy...when you face trials..."

Revelation 7:13-17 - "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"

Prayer: (*Extemporaneous*)

Pray not only for the body, but also for matters of the soul and mind—courage and peace, patience with the workings of God that cannot be understood, for the shaping of faith through perseverance. Pray that Christ would thwart attacks and accusations of the Enemy, and that this person will be able to resist Satan. Pray for family members who are also hurting at this time. Thank God that he will "never leave nor forsake" this child of his.

If the person is not known to be a believer, pray gently that through this time he might more closely see God and understand how to trust him in all the storms of life.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ If the person is not known to be a believer, watch for opportunities to present the gospel. If death is near, wait on the Spirit, but be direct and urgent about this person's need to repent and trust Christ. If she cannot speak, you can still articulate the elements of the gospel, and lead them through a prayer, leaving the outcome to God.
- ✓ If the person is very ill, he may not be able to concentrate on talking or even listening to Scripture but may listen and respond if you sing. It takes some courage to do so (what with others coming and going, and self-consciousness about one's voice) but simply singing familiar hymns and songs, as well as you can, can have a profound ministry to the patient. If need be, bring a hymnal or copies of some songs with you, or bring someone with you who can sing
- ✓ You may wish to inform the patient of the provisions of James 5:13-18 whereby they can ask the elders of the church to anoint and pray for them. (See "Anointing the Sick" for this service.)
- ✓ Find (or make) a simple booklet with Scripture and quotes to leave with the patient. Often, they are not up to serious reading, but a booklet with a few words per page is manageable.
- ✓ Leave your business card, especially if this person does not know you well, or if they were out of the room when you tried to visit. You might write a brief note on the back. You can also give your card to family members so they know how to reach you in an emergency.
- ✓ If the patient is sharing the room, be sensitive to the roommate. If it is not intrusive, ask the roommate how he or she is doing, and if they would like you to briefly pray for them. Even if the curtain is drawn you can pray for the person while you pray for your parishioner and they will likely hear you, along with the Lord.
- ✓ Some patients would be thankful for a CD or MP3 player so they can listen to Christian music. If they are up to it, provide them with recordings of the church services or sermons they might have missed. They might also enjoy an audiobook of the Bible.
- ✓ If they have endured a long stay, serve Communion to them in the sick bed. Small portable Communion sets can be purchased at a Christian bookstore. If possible, bring a couple others from church to share the time with you.
- ✓ When praying, hold the patient's hand, or touch them lightly on the shoulder. Touch is a powerful tool when someone is very ill.
- ✓ You might want to keep a small Bible in your car so you always have access to the Scriptures in the event you are called unexpectedly to the hospital.
- ✓ When you cannot visit in person, and if the patient is able to handle calls, telephone to visit and pray with them.

- ✓ If the hospital or nursing home has a Chaplain's Office, acquaint yourself with their services and personnel. You may also have opportunity to take a turn with other clergy in providing chaplaincy service.

MINISTERING TO THE BEREAVED

It takes a long time to recover from the loss of a loved one, especially a spouse or child, or the untimely death of a sibling. The most effective ministry tool, in most cases, is probably the listening ear; even our silent presence. When our friend cries out like Job, full of anguish and even anger, we must wait sensitively on the Spirit for guidance as to what and when to speak.

Each person's suffering is unique. No one else has hurt quite as they do, even those who have shared similar loss. Again, we are doctors of the soul, and must listen carefully for the signals of the soul's condition. It may be that our most powerful healing tool is our silent prayer. Avoid glib assurances like the plague!

Do not be afraid to ask frank questions: How is the grieving process going? What are your memories of ____? Do you struggle with any regrets? Do you ever feel angry with God, or the person who has died, or with yourself? Are you finding it difficult to pray or read your Bible? Is it painful to go to church? (Often the music at church is especially difficult for people, setting off a flood of emotion that nothing else in the service does.) Few people will talk to them frankly about the things they are thinking. They will usually welcome the questions and appreciate sympathetic listening. Let them talk about the one they have lost.

The bereaved require long-term care. For example, it generally takes up to two years to recover from the loss of a spouse. The loss of a child is even harder. The pastor must enlist others in tracking with this person through this long period, others who can call, visit, and pray. Be especially sensitive to the heartache of the person on special occasions: holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, and the anniversary of the death. A call or card is especially kindhearted at those times.

Scripture

See those listed under "Ministering to the Sick" and "The Funeral."

PASTORAL RECORDS

It is important to keep records of the main events over which the pastor officiates. You may want to use this information in annual reports to the congregation, but it is simply good to remember all these people and special occasions. This form may help you.

Child Dedications

Date	Name	Parents	Comments

Marriages

Date	Names	Comments

Conversions

Date	Name	Comments

Baptisms

Date	Name	Comment

Funerals

Date	Name	Comments

Preaching and Worship Planning Worksheet

Date	Theme	Text	Sermon Title	Worship Theme Note Communion, Dedications, etc.