



Worship Suggestions for Times of Transition

Ideas for the Time between the Decision and the Closing/Amalgamation/sale of property

- Ensure your worship leaders are aware that the congregation is going through a transition which will include grief, anxiety, disappointment, uncertainty and a range of other emotions.
- Consider choosing scripture passages which speak to times of transition and God's faithfulness. (See list of scripture readings in resources)
- Invite members to write a prayer, participate in planning or participate in another aspect of worship that helps to address the feelings of the congregation.
- Remind members that the church has not failed God's mission, they have fulfilled it and are being called to something new.³²
- Include a "Time to Remember" in the worship service. A short (5 minute) sharing of a particular memory such as Sunday school picnics, the construction of the church, work of the UCW or its predecessors, special celebrations, times of challenge etc. When possible, share a photo or piece of memorabilia. Invite members to lead this. Use a variety of older and more recent memories. Follow this with a favourite hymn and prayer such as:

God of all time and space, we give thanks for the (#) years of ministry and memories that we share. We give thanks for the privilege of sharing your love with one another and the world around us. In this time of change, help us to find comfort in memories, joy in the love and care that has been shared, and hope in the promise that our legacy will continue the ministry of this community of faith as we entrust all things to you. Amen

- Closing Worship Service. Consider hosting a celebration of the life of the community of faith as the last public worship service. Invite members of the community, former members of the congregation, recipients of the legacy gifts etc. to attend.
- Hold a private worship service for the congregation, shortly after the public service to allow them to say goodbye.³³ This service could include:
 - deconsecrating the property
 - a walk through the building with a prayer of gratitude for each room
 - receiving a symbolic keepsake
 - communion

- recommissioning the members for ministry elsewhere
- Provide the members with a symbolic keepsake. Some congregations have made crosses from a pew or other object. A photo, teacup or mug from the kitchen, plant from the flower beds, package of seeds to remind them of their legacy etc. Be sure to share these with members who are unable to attend in person.
- When a congregation will be amalgamating, nesting with another community of faith or moving to a new location, the final public worship service might include focusing on a symbol or item that they will take with them to the new location, such as a Christ candle, Bible, communion chalice, lantern, etc. This could be blessed with gratitude at the closing service and then carried out of the building. It is then carried into the new location at the beginning of the first worship service in that place. This helps to honour the continuity of their ministry.

Prayers

1. **Prayer for a Discernment/Discussion Meeting**

Based on Galatians 5:25 ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. NRSV

Holy One, today we are gathered together to listen to your Spirit and one another. We pray that you will join us in this time of reflection and wondering about the future of this community of faith.

Guided by your Spirit, this congregation has worshipped and served as faithful witnesses to your grace and love. Now, trusting in your presence, we ask that our hearts and minds be open to hear what the Spirit is saying to (Name) United Church as we explore options together.

Grant us ears to hear, eyes to see and faith to follow where you lead.
This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

2. **Prayer For a Congregational Meeting to Vote on a Change**

God of all time and seasons,
by the power of your Spirit, we are gathered together as your church.

Together we have praised you and given thanks for your love and blessings,
Together we have prayed in the name of Jesus
Together we have learned and practiced what it means to love you, love our neighbours and love ourselves.

Together we have celebrated and lived out our faith as part of (name) United Church.

Response: We are disciples of Jesus

We trust that there is meaning and purpose in the cycle of life we share
We trust that you are with us in beginnings, endings and everything in between.
We trust that you are present with us now as we face difficult decisions, deep emotions and uncertainty.

Response: We believe in resurrection

Open our minds and hearts that we might listen and speak with love
Open our imaginations and awareness that we might share ideas
And may your Spirit continue to guide us, and your love enfold us as we seek faithful decisions as your church. Amen

3. Prayer After a Congregational Meeting

Loving God, we give you thanks for your steadfast presence with us today.

Supported by your love, we found the courage for difficult conversations and challenging decisions. (Pause for a moment of silence)

In this time of change, may we hold fast to the stories in scripture and our own lives that remind us of your presence and guidance through beginnings and endings, exile and homecoming, and everything in between. (Pause for a moment of silence)

As we breathe in and out, help us feel strengthened for the journey of change and help us trust that all tomorrows are in your hand.

Bless us, and hold us close, now and always. Amen

4. Prayer For Worship Services before the Final Service

God of all time and space, we give thanks for the (#) years of ministry and memories that we share. We give thanks for the privilege of sharing your love with one another and the world around us. In this time of change, help us to find comfort in memories, joy in the love and care that has been shared, and hope in the promise that with our legacy our ministry will continue. Help us to entrust all things to you. Amen

5. Prayer to Deconsecrate the Church Property (this is not required in United Church practice; however, it is often requested by the congregation, particularly if the property will be used for a secular purpose.)

O God who has created and is creating, we know that all creation is sacred, and every corner of the universe is an expression of your love. This particular place holds special meaning for

us because it is here that we have experienced your presence, heard your Word, celebrated baptism, dined at your table, and marked the milestones of our lives.

Response: We give thanks for your presence here

In this place hospitality has been given and received. Laughter and tears have been shared, ministry planned, gifts given and community nurtured within these walls. Truly this is holy ground.

Response: We give thanks for your presence here

This sanctuary has reverberated with songs of praise, been filled with heartfelt prayers and been our gathering place for worship.

Response: We give thanks for your presence here

Now it will no longer be the home for (name) United Church. This land and building will be used to meet other needs and serve other purposes, but the memory of this place will continue to hold a special place in our hearts and memories.

Response: We give thanks for your presence with us as we move on, trusting that you are with us wherever we go.

And the One whose love fills all creation shall be with us, this day and always. Amen

6. Final Service Prayer of Recommissioning (This is a prayer to bless people as they renew their commitment to serving God)

God, you were there, rejoicing on the day of our birth. You celebrated as we bathed in waters of baptism, embraced us as we confirmed our faith and called us by name to come and follow you. It was your Spirit that drew us together as your church in this place and guided us in the ministry we shared. Once again, we hear your voice calling us from the familiar and inviting us to come and see where we are needed, come and see you in new places and new people.

Response: God give us open hearts to hear your call and faith to respond

Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd, the one who leads us through life and through change. Just as you promised to be with your disciples until the end of the age, you have promised to guide and care for us as we continue to follow you.

Response: God give us open hearts to hear your call and faith to respond

Spirit of Life, you draw us together to be the church, that we might share the good news and proclaim God's amazing love and grace. Blessed by your gifts, our lives are changed as we join with others near and far to reach out in your name.

Response: God give us open hearts to hear your call and faith to respond

Now as we face an ending, help us trust your promise of new beginnings. Good Shepherd, lead us and continue to bless us with gifts of your Spirit that we might go forth rejoicing to serve you in new places and new ways.

Response: God give us open hearts to hear your call and faith to respond. Amen

7. Final Service Benediction and Recommissioning

Filled with the Holy Spirit, let us go forth rejoicing in the love of God. Let us go forth following wherever Christ may lead us. And may the blessings of God be upon you. May you dance with the Spirit, be strengthened by hope, and filled with the joy of knowing God is with us, we are not alone, this day and forevermore. Amen

Scripture Passages

- Genesis 12:1–9 (Abraham goes to new territory in faith.)
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (For everything there is a season)
- Exodus 33:14-15
- Ruth 1 (Ruth risks a change of family and place.)
- Psalm 16 (Confidence in God)
- Psalm 42 (As a deer longs for water)
- Psalm 46 (God is with us.)
- Psalm 100 (Song of thanksgiving and trust)
- Psalm 103 (Merciful and loving God)
- Psalm 121 (Assurance of God's care)
- Isaiah 40:1–11 (Words of hope and comfort)
- Isaiah 43:1–7 (Do not be afraid.)
- Isaiah 66:1–2 (Don't worry about the building.)
- Matthew 6:25–34 (Do not worry; God cares.)
- Matthew 25:34–40 (Who do we care for?)
- Matthew 28:20 (I am with you always)
- Luke 9:57–62 (Do not look back.)
- John 14: 1, 18-20, 27 (Do not let your heart be troubled)
- John 15:1–11 (The vine and the branches)
- Acts 17:22–34a (God does not live in temples.)
- Ephesians 2:17–22 (One in Christ)
- Ephesians 4:4-6 (There is one body and one Spirit)
- Colossians 1:17-20 (Jesus is the head of the body)

- 1 Peter 2:4–10 (Building the faith community)
- 1 Corinthians 1:10–17 (No divisions!)³⁴
- 1 Timothy 3:15 (church is the household of God)
- Hebrews 10:19-25 (Hold tight to faith)
- Revelation 3:22 (Hear what the Spirit is saying)
- Revelation 22:13 (I am the Alpha and the Omega)

Resources

The following is a list of resources to assist with leading people through the transition of disbanding, amalgamating, property renovation and other significant changes in the lifecycle of the congregation.

United Church of Canada Material

The Manual, The United Church of Canada <https://united-church.ca/handbooks-and-guidelines>

Congregational Board of Trustees Handbook <https://united-church.ca/handbooks-and-guidelines>

Regional Council Handbooks and toolkits. See Regional Council Webpage

TUCC, <https://www.tucc.ca/>

United Property Resource Corporation, <https://www.uprc.ca/>

Worship Resources <https://united-church.ca/worship-theme/milestones-and-transitions>

Books

Bridges, William. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change, 3rd Edition*. William Bridges and Associates Inc., 2009.

Gaede, Beth Ann (editor). *Ending with Hope: A Resource for Closing Congregations*. The Alban Institute, 2002. (*Excellent Resource*)

Rendle, Gilbert R. *Leading Change in the Congregation*. The Alban Institute, 1998.

Rendle, Gilbert R. *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.

Satterlee, Craig A. *When God Speaks Through Change: Preaching in Times of Congregational Transition*. The Alban Institute, 2005.

On-Line Resources and Consultation

Good Friday Collaborative, “Five Stages of Concluding Ministry, www.goodfridaycollaborative.com, 2024.

Interim Ministry Network, <https://imnedu.org/>