

Guidelines for Closing Churches

**Prepared by the National Liturgical Council
for the Bishops Commission for Liturgy**



**Approved by the
Bishops Commission for Liturgy
of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**

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General Introduction

A church building is an integral part of the life of a faith community - a gathering place for Sunday and weekday worship, sacramental celebrations and devotions. People may associate treasured memories of significant life events such as weddings and funerals with a particular church building.

The closure of a church therefore has a significant impact on a faith community. Such a decision is not taken lightly and, in many instances, may be a last resort after other options have been exhausted.

These guidelines have been prepared to assist communities who are faced with closing a church. They outline relevant Church documents and resources, the importance of the process of closing a church and some practical considerations, including transferring to a new worship space.

A number of ritual options have also been prepared which may assist with the closing of a church. These worship resources are available in various forms and are used in conjunction with these guidelines.

Ritual Forms:

1. Mass (Closure of a Church)
2. Mass: alternative form (Closure of a Church)
3. Liturgy of the Word (Closure of a Church)
4. Liturgy of Lament (Before the Closure of a Church)

Copies of these ritual forms are available from local Diocesan Offices as well as the National Liturgy Office.

CANON LAW

The Code of Canon Law (1983), and other documents provide guidance in safeguarding the respect that is owed to both the sacred building dedicated to God and to the spiritual welfare of the community of God's holy people during a stage of significant and, often, emotional transition.

Can. 1212 Sacred places lose their dedication or blessing if they have been destroyed in large part, or have been turned over permanently to profane use by decree of the competent ordinary or in fact.

Can. 1222 §1 If a church cannot be used in any way for divine worship and there is no possibility of repairing it, the diocesan bishop can relegate it to profane but not sordid use.

Can. 1222 §2 Where other grave causes suggest that a church no longer be used for divine worship, the diocesan bishop, after having heard the presbyteral council, can relegate it to profane but not sordid use, with the consent of those who legitimately claim rights for themselves in the church and provided that the good of souls suffers no detriment thereby.

Can. 1238 §1. An altar loses its dedication or blessing according to the norm of can. 1212.

Canon 1238 §2. Altars, whether fixed or movable, do not lose their dedication or blessing if the church or other sacred place is relegated to profane uses.

In addition to these canons, consideration must be given to those canons relating to alienation (Canon 1298-1298). Consideration is also to be given to all sacred objects, relics, sacred furnishings, stained glass windows, bells, confessionals etc and altars.

Those responsible for overseeing the closure of a church building are advised to seek canonical advice in interpreting and applying these canons and other relevant Church documents, such as the procedural guidelines issued by the Congregation for the Clergy (2013) and the Pontifical Council for Culture (2018), the Australian Catholic Bishops Statement *Fit For Sacred Use: Stewardship and Renewal of Places of Worship* (Liturgy Brisbane: 2018). Such texts provide requirements or suggestions for diocesan and parish personnel in relation to practices that should be observed and principles that should be followed in relation to the preparation of the parish community and closure of the church building.

THE PROCESS

The way a decision is made and the transition to closure are elements that are as important as the decision itself. A local community that is involved in decision-making will have opportunities to acknowledge and understand the circumstances more fully and play a more active part in guiding the often-painful process of closing a local church. This process is not always easy, but this approach has many lasting benefits.

Processes that are not rushed enable people to have sufficient time to come to terms with the loss of their local church. Taking time to establish committees and working groups, and offering the support and assistance of local diocesan personnel is recommended. The final liturgical celebration is the culmination of the leave-taking process.

Encouraging and supporting a community to develop its own pathway towards closure respects the sanctity of the community and the liturgical celebrations which have been the source and summit of the life of grace and discipleship. By fostering a collaborative and listening spirit, the Christian Community models its actions on Christ who showed compassion and love for all.

Some Pastoral Considerations

Forming a Local Committee

- Establish a local committee, *i.e.* local community, pastoral council, or parish group together with the local Pastor.
- Nominate 2 diocesan representatives to the local committee: liturgy coordinator and a pastoral minister.
- Provide specific diocesan assistance and advice, especially in the areas of finance, administration, heritage, legal and property, always working with the local committee.
- Engage with the local Bishop during the process.

Allowing Sufficient Time

- Allow sufficient time to establish a committee that can guide and lead the process effectively.
- Encourage the community to reflect on the reality of the situation before decision making occurs.
- Be accepting of each community's approach, taking into account their differing needs, circumstances, resources, and the people involved.

Assisting with Leave-taking

- Encourage creative and meaningful activities that acknowledge the unique character and history of the local community before the ritual closure occurs.
- Assist the community to identify sacred furnishings and objects and to make appropriate decisions about their removal and future use.
- Prepare a ritual framework with the guidance of a diocesan liturgy coordinator.
- Encourage the community to be fully involved in preparing and participating in the final liturgy.
- Invite the Bishop to preside at the final liturgy.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Each Church Closure is Different

It is important to adopt a compassionate approach to each church closure and acknowledge that each church community is different. The faith community may have great love for their spiritual home and an impending closure of the church may result in trauma and feelings of loss or anger, especially when people are not given sufficient opportunity to engage in the process of decision making. Each community's response is unique. Acknowledgement and affirmation of the shared history of the sacred place and the spiritual and social bonds which have shaped the community over so many years is a vital part of the process. Caring

pastorally for the community and ritualising what is to happen needs ample time and space. It is important to make space for the expression of grief, dissent, gratitude, lamentation and hope during the transition process.

The History of the Church and its Community

- Find out as much as possible about the history of the church – the land on which it was built, the bishop who founded the parish, the process of designing and building the church and other associated facts.
- Ask the local community (both within the parish and wider community) for stories about the parish and its church. The parish historian or local historical societies or local government authorities as well as the diocesan archivist might provide historical detail, including newspaper reports, photographs, letters or title deeds.
- Provide and publish a succinct history of the church for the parish community.
- If the parish had its own archive collection, determine who is now to take charge of it. Options may include the new parish to which the community will belong and /or the diocesan archives.
- Assemble an infographic depicting the journeying from grieving to hope. This can be an important way of acknowledging the ongoing life and mission of the people of the local community.
- If not already done, record and display the history of the church and its community, together with historical memorabilia and photographs. Parish historians and the diocesan archivist are useful contacts and can provide helpful advice.
- Collect personal stories from community members to encourage the sharing of memories.
- Plan several activities and community gatherings over a period of time. These may include social events, displays of photos, and prayer services or liturgies of lament. Being aware of the range of feelings within the community is an important factor in shaping and offering various forms of ritualised leave taking.
- Provide ongoing pastoral care after the church has closed, especially to those who voiced strong feelings about the closure. The observance of anniversaries might offer some measure of acknowledgement and healing.

The Church and its Contents

Engage a small team from the community, together with the parish historian and the diocesan archivist in listing all the items in the church and ascertaining their provenance. Consulting parish records and members of the parish community will also be very helpful in collecting the relevant information.

For further information, consult *Fit for Sacred Use: Stewardship and Renewal of Places of Worship* (Appendix II: Making an Inventory- Catalogue, pp. 116-117). The Diocesan Liturgy Office will have a copy of this reference book by the National Liturgical Art and Architecture Council.

Some Pertinent Questions and Issues to Discuss

1. Items in or around the church building:

- What is the history and use of this item?
- Has it been gifted by a family, individual or group? If yes, it may be appropriate to offer the item to be returned to them if it is not to be housed elsewhere.
- What will happen to this item once the church has been closed? Can it be respectfully received and used in another church, chapel, school or by another agency?

2. Sacred liturgical books:

- Are current editions of the *Roman Missal*, *Lectionary for Mass* and ritual books able to be used by another parish, either within the diocese or outside of it?
- Outdated editions of liturgical books can be safely rehoused in the diocesan archives.

3. Sacramental registers:

- Sacramental registers should be housed in a new parish or within the diocesan archives.

4. The church building:

- What is to happen to the church once it is closed? Are there planning safeguards in place with local government councils that prevent a church being used for profane or unsuitable purposes?
- How will the church be maintained in the meantime? This process requires community input and advice from the relevant parish and diocesan authorities.
- If the church is listed on a heritage register, certain processes of conservation and future use may need to be followed (See *Fit for Sacred Use* p. 123).

LOOKING AHEAD

Open communication, frequent prayer and careful planning will keep the community both informed and involved in the transition process.

- Prepare rituals and published prayers (including weekly petitions) for the transfer of the community to its new home.
- Prepare rituals of welcome and acknowledgment if the community is joining with another community in their place of worship.
- Consider where the sacred items from the church will be housed. Keep the community informed about what has happened and what will happen to these items. -
- If appropriate, detail the opportunities for community members to return to the site of the former church.
- This document is to be reviewed in 2026.

RESOURCES

1. The Book of Blessings

(International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 1989).

This liturgical book contains the blessings of the Roman Ritual for the Universal Church, including blessings pertaining to persons, to objects and for various occasions, as well as blessings and services connected with official parish events. Texts also available online for subscribers to the online Catholic liturgy preparation sites [Liturgy Help](#) or [Liturgia](#).

2. Fit for Sacred Use: Stewardship and Renewal of Places of Worship (National Liturgical Art and Architecture Council, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2018).

This book, while focussing on the renewal of worship spaces, does have useful Appendices:

- Compiling an inventory-catalogue (pp.116-117)
- Heritage of Sacred Buildings (pp. 122-123)
- Processes to consider when a building is no longer fit for sacred use (pp. 124)
- Taking Leave of the Sacred Building (pp. 124-126)

3. A Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure (Michael Weldon, Liturgical Press, 2004).

This is a thoughtful and comprehensive consideration of the issues facing faith communities on the closure of their church or consolidation of parishes. Fr Weldon uses the lived experiences of communities in various Diocese in America and offers a way of approaching potentially painful and difficult situations with pastoral care and sensitivity. The appendices contain various helpful ritual outlines which may be adapted to suit the circumstances of a particular community.

RITUAL FORMS FOR CLOSING OF CHURCHES

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CONTACTS

National Liturgy Office: liturgy@catholic.org.au

Mass - Closure of a Church

This ritual outline follows the usual pattern of a eucharistic celebration, suggesting readings and texts that are particularly suited to the final Mass being celebrated before a church closure. Before the Concluding Rites, the assembly joins in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving; then a series of prayers and acclamations are prayed and sung at key places in the church. The assembly moves together to each of these places in the church in turn. A musical refrain is sung by the assembly after the prayers at each place. After the solemn blessing and dismissal, suggestions are given for the ceremonial departure and closing of the doors, and for a reception event at which parishioners might continue to share stories.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Hymn

Greeting

Presider In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
All Amen.

Presider Peace be with you.
All And with your spirit.

Or, if the Presider is not a Bishop,

Presider In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
All Amen.

Presider The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
All And with your spirit.

Introduction and Welcome

In these or similar words:

Presider This place carries many memories. For ___ years, people have been baptised in the waters of this font, and become part of the Christian community. Week by week we have gathered to give thanks to God. While there is sadness in the closing of this church, we are grateful for all that it has meant to us. Although this is our last celebration in this church, we will continue to hear God's Word and share the Lord's Table. Who we are in God's eyes and what we believe in, cannot be limited by human structures. In a spirit of gratitude, then, let us prepare our minds and hearts to celebrate these holy mysteries and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us boldly into a new future.

Sprinkling Rite or Penitential Rite

Sprinkling Rite

Presider We mark this occasion with the Sprinkling Rite since it recalls our baptism and membership of the family of God. Even as this church closes, we continue to be united through baptism, to every Catholic parish throughout the diocese, and indeed across the world. Let us ask God to bless this water.

Or:

Presider My brothers and sisters, this water will be used to remind us of our baptism. We remember all those baptised here, from the first person to be baptised in this church, *(name of person)* in *(year of baptism)*, to the last, *(name of person)* in *(year of baptism)*. Let us ask God to bless this water and keep us faithful to the Spirit which God has given us.

After a brief silence, he joins his hands and continues:

God our Father,
you created water to make the fields fruitful
and to refresh and cleanse our bodies.
In baptism,
your gift of water washes away our sins and brings us eternal
life. We ask you to bless this water,
the source of purification,
as we seek forgiveness of our sins.
Renew the living well-spring of your grace within us
and protect us in spirit and body
as we come into your presence with hearts made clean
to receive your gift of salvation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Or: Blessing of Water A (RM 1507)

Dear sisters and brothers,
let us humbly beseech the Lord our God
to bless this water he has created, which
will be sprinkled on us
as a memorial of our Baptism.
May he help us by his grace
to remain faithful to the Spirit we have received.

Almighty ever-living God,
who willed that through water,
the fountain of life and the source of purification,
even souls should be cleansed
and receive the gift of eternal life;
be pleased, we pray, to + bless this water,
by which we seek protection on this your day, O Lord.

Renew the living spring of your grace within us
and grant that by this water we may be defended
from all ills of spirit and body,
and so approach you with hearts made clean
and worthily receive your salvation.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Presider sprinkles the gathered assembly while a hymn or chant is sung.

Presider Lord God,
 Creator and giver of life,
 we thank you for this water which we use in faith.
 Wash away the sin that divides us,
 make new life spring up within us,
 and lead us, whole and complete, into your presence
 to bless your glorious name.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Or

Penitential Act

Choose forms from the Roman Missal or compose your own, based on these forms.

Gloria (optional) Collect

Presider Let us pray.
 God our Father, through Christ your Son
 you have called your people to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
 Through the Holy Spirit,
 unite your people and lead us in your wisdom and truth.
 Help us to show forth the living presence of Christ in the world,
 and lead us in the ways of goodness and love.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
 Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

All Amen.

Or

Another appropriate Collect from the Roman Missal.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Choose from the following suggestions or select others from the Lectionary.

Readings of the day must be used if celebrating the liturgy on a Sunday in Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter.

First Reading

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 40:1-11

God consoles his people.

Isaiah 60:1-6

All peoples will walk in your light.

Ezekiel 34:11-16

As a shepherd keeps all his flock in view, so shall I keep my sheep in view.

Hosea 2:16-17, 21-22

I will betroth you to me for ever.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 22

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Psalm 26

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Psalm 66:2-3, 5, 7-8

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

Psalm 95:1-3, 7-10

R. Proclaim his marvellous deeds to all the nations.

Psalm 117:22-23, 25-26, 28

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.

Psalm 144:1-2, 8-11, 13-14

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

Luke 1:47-55

R. The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

Second Reading

Philippians 3:8-14

All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings.

Romans 8:31, 38-39

Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

I never stop thanking God for you.

1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17

You are the temple of God.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Before the world was made, he chose us in Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Through the Lord, the whole building is bound together as one holy temple.

1 Peter 2:4-9

As living stones, you will be built into a spiritual temple.

Gospel Acclamation and Gospel

1.

Ezekiel 37:27

Alleluia, alleluia!

My dwelling place shall be with them, says the Lord, and I will be their God and they will be my people. Alleluia!

Matthew 6:25-34

Do not worry about tomorrow.

2.

John 6:63, 68

Alleluia, alleluia!

Your words, Lord, are spirit and life;
you have the words of everlasting life.
Alleluia!

John 4:19-24

True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

3.

John 15:9, 5

Alleluia, alleluia!
Remain in my love, says the Lord;
all who live in me and I in them will bear much fruit.
Alleluia!

John 15:1-8

All who live in me, and I in them, bear fruit.

4.

John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life.
Alleluia!

John 20:19-23

As the Father sent me, so I send you: Receive the Holy Spirit.

5.

John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
the one who follows me will have the light of life.
Alleluia!

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the light of the world.

6.

Mark 1:17

Alleluia, alleluia!
Come, follow me, says the Lord,
and I will make you fishers of my people.
Alleluia!

Mark 1:14-20

I will make you fishers of people.

7.

Matthew 4:19

Alleluia, alleluia!
Come follow me, says the Lord,
and I will make you fishers of my people.
Alleluia!

Luke 5:1-11

They left everything and followed him.

8.

cf Luke 24:32

Alleluia, alleluia!
Lord Jesus, make your word plain to us:
make our hearts burn with love when you speak.
Alleluia!

Luke 24:13-35

They recognised him at the breaking of the bread.

Homily

Prayers of Intercession

Presider Dear friends, confident that God is with us in times of joy and in times of trial, let us bring our prayers before the Lord.

- 1.** For the Pope and for our local bishop/s. May God bless them with the courage to lead the Church with wisdom, integrity and compassion. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

- 2.** For all who have faithfully served this community through preaching, teaching, prayer and pastoral care. May their example inspire us to loving service. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

- 3.** For the founders of this community, and for the generations of past parishioners who have given witness through their faith-filled and generous actions. May the seeds of faith sown here continue to bear lasting fruit. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

4. For this community of faith, that we may have courage to move forward with confidence, trusting in the Lord's providence. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

5. For all those in Australia and beyond who are experiencing change and transition. May disappointment be eased, fear dispelled and new life flourish. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

6. For all those who have died, especially members of this parish community. Grant them a place at the table in God's heavenly kingdom. Lord hear us.

All Lord hear our prayer.

Presider Lord God, wherever two or three are gathered in your name you are there. Hear our prayer and give us the strength to continue living and working in your name wherever you choose to lead us. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Offerings

Prayer over the Offerings

The Eucharistic Prayer

Preface for the Dedication of a Church (RM 1285) (or another from the Roman Missal)

The Communion Rite

Prayer after Communion

As the communion rite concludes and the assembly are singing the communion song, ministers remove the altar cloth and lighted altar candles.

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

Presider Gracious God, we give you thanks for the life of the Gospel in this community through the worship life in ___ church.

The following prayer might be prayed aloud by the whole assembly, or by several different readers from the parish who each take turns to read a section.

We give thanks for the Word proclaimed in Spirit and in Truth,
the prayers prayed,
the songs sung, the singers and the musicians,
the bread and the wine,
the water and the children,
the teachers and the preachers,
the confirmations & affirmations,
the marriages and the promises,
the funerals and the comfort,
the laughter, the tears, the hopes and the fears,
and the sighs too deep for words.

Such things turn a building into a house of worship.
Such things make the distance between heaven
and earth seem slight.

Lord we give thanks
that what has taken place in this house of worship
has sent ripples of hope into the community, things
we know of and much hidden from us,
yet signs nevertheless of your love that has led us out
to serve as we have been served
to love as we have been loved
to forgive as we have been forgiven
to trust that God has used us despite our shortcomings.

Today while we acknowledge the passing of the season of this house of worship,
we pray that your hand will continue to guide us and bless us in the new season upon us.
Help us to be attentive to you, as we seek to serve you in this community.
In the quiet, we reflect on our time in this building
and we remember with gratitude those with whom we have shared and are no longer
with us...

(a moment of silence)

With a clear understanding that our God is not confined to buildings made by human hands, we the people of this church and community, grateful for our heritage and mindful of the sacrifices of those who have gone before, dedicate ourselves anew to the service of God in Spirit and Truth, and to the service of all people in the spirit of Christ, as we close this church of _____, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen

Prayer composed by Rev. Martin Stewart for the closure of St Stephen's in Christchurch, NZ. <https://marttherev.wordpress.com/2016/05/12/decommissioning-prayer/>

- Or** Hymn of Thanksgiving
- Or** Michael Weldon, *Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure*, Liturgical Press, 2004, p 203 or 214.
- Or** CCCB Sunday Celebrations of Word and Hours - Litany of Praise p 244
- Or** The Magnificat (*Luke 1:46-55*) (Lect Vol 1 p.89)

Prayer over Church Spaces

The assembly moves together to each of these places in the church in turn. A musical refrain is sung by the assembly after the prayers at each place.

The refrain might be chosen from the following suggestions, or a suitable alternative used instead.

My soul rejoices in God, my Saviour CWBII 212

Tell out, my soul (one verse each time) CWBII 213

I will bless you all my life, Lord CWBII 182

In Faith and Hope and Love CWBII 520

In the Lord, I'll Be Ever Thankful CWBII 522

My Peace be Upon You Forever CWBII 558

Sing Praise to the Lord all our Days CWBII 602

Baptismal Font

Reader 1 This baptismal font
has been the place of rebirth.
By water and the Holy Spirit we have received new life
and become God's own children.

Reader 2 We pray for all who have been baptised in this saving font,
that, by their way of life, they may continue to give glory to God's name.

Pause for silent prayer.

Presider Lord God,
You have created us in your own image
and sanctified us through baptism.
You have been the source of hope for your people.
Make us always and everywhere conscious of your gift
and of our Christian dignity.

**All Here we have professed our faith in the presence of the community.
Here our sins have been forgiven.
May we grow in union with Christ and rise to new life in him.**

Sung refrain

Presidential Chair

Reader 1 This chair has been the place
 where pastors of this community have proclaimed the word and
 celebrated the sacraments.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have presided in Christ's name
 and led this community of faith in loving service.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord Jesus, you are the good Shepherd
 who gathers the scattered sheep into one fold.
 Guide your people along the right path and lead us to our heavenly home.

**All Here we have been inspired with the word of truth.
 Here we have been called to serve.
 May we walk in your ways all the days of our life.**

Sung refrain

Ambo

Reader 1 From this place, the word of God has been proclaimed.
 We have listened, we have responded.
 At this table we have been nourished by the word of life.

Reader 2 We pray for all the faithful who have gathered around this table
 and received the Word in their hearts.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider O God, your word is spirit and life
 and the lamp that guides our feet.
 Stir in us your Holy Spirit to enflame our hearts
 to live the good news.

**All Here we have been nourished by the living word.
 Here we have heard Christ speak to us not as strangers but as friends.
 May the Word of God truly become for us spirit and life.**

Sung refrain

Altar

Reader 1 From this altar, the table of the Eucharist, we have been fed:
the table of our unity, a banquet of plenty,
and a source of the Spirit.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have gathered around this altar,
offered their gifts,
poured out their prayers
and shared in the banquet of the Lord.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord God, in the sharing of one Bread and Cup,
this altar has been a symbol of communion and peace.
We praise and thank you for the gift of your Son
whose Body and Blood we have received.

**All Here we have celebrated Christ's death and resurrection.
Here we have broken and shared the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.
May we be transformed into the likeness of Christ.**

Sung refrain

Cross and Devotional Objects

Reader 1 This Cross, these Stations, and these devotional objects
have been a sign of protection, comfort and strength
to the people of this community.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have spent time
in prayerful contemplation before these objects,
and fostered a love of Christ in their hearts.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord God,
your Son reconciled us to you by suffering on the cross
and then returned to you in glory.
May your people who have looked upon these sacred objects
shoulder their own crosses
in the spirit of the Gospel until their journey ends.

**All Here we have bowed down in adoration.
Here we have pondered Christ's saving love and mercy.
May the cross be our comfort in trouble,
our refuge in the face of danger,
our safeguard on life's journey.**

Sung refrain

CONCLUDING RITES

Let us pray.

Lord God, you are our refuge; our eternal home is in you.

For _____ years, this church building of _____
has been a source of grace and blessing.

As we leave this place of worship,
we thank you for all the blessings that you have given us.
Protect us on our pilgrim journey and keep us faithful to you.
Guide us to new places of worship,
so that we may continue to give glory to your name.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Solemn Blessing and Dismissal

Presider	The Lord be with you.
All	And with your Spirit.

Priest or Deacon	Bow down for the blessing.
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Presider (RM 714)	May the Lord bless you and keep you. Amen. May he let his face shine upon you and show you his mercy. Amen. May he turn his countenance towards you and give you his peace. Amen. And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son,+ and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever. Amen.
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Presider (or Deacon)	Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.
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All	Thanks be to God
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Recessional Song

If there is a parish banner, this can be carried out of the assembly in procession with the cross, candles, altar cloths, ministers, and presider.

As the people leave in procession, each member of the community may be invited to kiss the altar.

Ceremonial Departure and Closing of the Doors

Outside the Church

Presider With thanks to God for all the good accomplished here,
I declare the church of _____ now closed.

When the lights have been switched off and the doors and windows closed, people should be advised that the church is now closed. People should not re-enter the church. A sense of finality is important.

Some options might include a procession to another place, or a final song.

The Mass may also end in silence with parishioners invited to remain in the church for as long as they wish. After the last person exits the church, the doors are then locked.

Variations to the rites may be appropriate, especially after local circumstances and needs are considered carefully.

Reception

The procession could continue to the hall for a reception.

If there are church bells, they could be rung during this movement.

Displays of parish history, photographs, albums, and story-telling should continue to be shared.

A prayer card with important dates in the history of the parish, or perhaps a small bottle of holy water from the font would be meaningful gifts to send home with those present.

Additional speeches and addresses might be given at the reception.

Mass - Closure of a Church (Alternate Form)

In the previous ritual form, the thanksgiving prayers and acclamations over the church spaces were gathered together before the concluding rites, with the assembly moving together to each of the places in turn. In this ritual outline, the prayers and acclamations are interwoven throughout the liturgy. For example, the prayer over the Ambo takes place at the outset of the Liturgy of the Word; the prayer over the altar takes place after the Preparation of the Offerings. In the same way as the previous ritual form, after the solemn blessing and dismissal, suggestions are given for the ceremonial departure and closing of the doors, and for a reception event at which parishioners might continue to share stories.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Hymn

Greeting

Presider In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen.

Presider Peace be with you.

All And with your spirit.

Or, if the Presider is not a Bishop,

Presider In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen.

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

All And with your spirit.

Introduction and Welcome

In these or similar words:

Presider This place carries many memories. For ___ years, people have been baptised in the waters of this font, and become part of the Christian community. Week by week we have gathered to give thanks to God. While there is sadness in the closing of this church, we are grateful for all that it has meant to us. Although this is our last celebration in this church, we will continue to hear God's Word and share the Lord's Table. Who we are in God's eyes and what we believe in, cannot be limited by human structures. In a spirit of gratitude, then, let us prepare our minds and hearts to celebrate these holy mysteries and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us boldly into a new future.

Sprinkling Rite or Penitential Rite

Prayer at the Baptismal Font

Reader 1 This baptismal font
has been the place of rebirth. By water and the Holy Spirit
we have received new life and become God's own children.

Reader 2 We pray for all who have been baptised in this saving font,
that, by their way of life, they may continue to give glory to God's name.

Pause for silent prayer.

Presider Lord God,
You have created us in your own image
and sanctified us through baptism.
You have been the source of hope for your people.
Make us always and everywhere conscious of your gift
and of our Christian dignity.

**All Here we have professed our faith in the presence of the community.
Here our sins have been forgiven.
May we grow in union with Christ and rise to new life in him.**

Sung refrain

The refrain might be chosen from the following suggestions, or a suitable alternative used instead.

My soul rejoices in God, my Saviour CWBII 212
Tell out, my soul (one verse each time) CWBII 213
I will bless you all my life, Lord CWBII 182
In Faith and Hope and Love CWBII 520
In the Lord, I'll Be Ever Thankful CWBII 522
My Peace be Upon You Forever CWBII 558
Sing Praise to the Lord all our Days CWBII 602

Sprinkling Rite

Presider We mark this occasion with the Sprinkling Rite since it recalls our baptism and
membership of the family of God. Even as this church closes, we continue to be
united through baptism, to every Catholic parish throughout the diocese, and indeed
across the world. Let us ask God to bless this water.

Or:

Presider My brothers and sisters, this water will be used to remind us of our baptism. We remember all those baptised here, from the first person to be baptised in this church, *(name of person)* in *(year of baptism)*, to the last, *(name of person)* in *(year of baptism)*. Let us ask God to bless this water and keep us faithful to the Spirit he has given us.

After a brief silence, he joins his hands and continues:

God our Father,
you created water to make the fields fruitful
and to refresh and cleanse our bodies.
In baptism,
your gift of water washes away our sins and brings us eternal
life. We ask you to bless this water,
the source of purification,
as we seek forgiveness of our sins.
Renew the living well-spring of your grace within us
and protect us in spirit and body
as we come into your presence with hearts made clean
to receive your gift of salvation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Or: Blessing of Water A (RM 1507)

Dear sisters and brothers,
let us humbly beseech the Lord our God
to bless this water he has created, which
will be sprinkled on us
as a memorial of our Baptism.
May he help us by his grace
to remain faithful to the Spirit we have received.

Almighty ever-living God,
who willed that through water,
the fountain of life and the source of purification,
even souls should be cleansed
and receive the gift of eternal life;
be pleased, we pray, to + bless this water,
by which we seek protection on this your day, O Lord.
Renew the living spring of your grace within us
and grant that by this water we may be defended
from all ills of spirit and body,
and so approach you with hearts made clean
and worthily receive your salvation.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Presider sprinkles the gathered assembly while a hymn or chant is sung.

Presider Lord God,
 Creator and giver of life,
 we thank you for this water which we use in faith.
 Wash away the sin that divides us,
 make new life spring up within us,
 and lead us, whole and complete, into your presence
 to bless your glorious name.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Or

Penitential Act

Choose forms from the Roman Missal or compose your own, based on these forms.

Gloria (optional)

Collect

Presider Let us pray.
 God our Father, through Christ your Son
 you have called your people to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
 Through the Holy Spirit,
 unite your people and lead us in your wisdom and truth.
 Help us to show forth the living presence of Christ in the world,
 and lead us in the ways of goodness and love.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
 Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

All Amen.

Or

Another appropriate Collect from the Roman Missal.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Prayer at the Ambo

Reader 1 From this place, the word of God has been proclaimed.
We have listened, we have responded.
At this table we have been nourished by the word of life.

Reader 2 We pray for all the faithful who have gathered around this table
and received the Word in their hearts.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider O God, your word is spirit and life
and the lamp that guides our feet.
Stir in us your Holy Spirit to enflame our hearts
to live the good news.

All **Here we have been nourished by the living word.
Here we have heard Christ speak to us not as strangers but as friends.
May the Word of God truly become for us spirit and life.**

Sung refrain

*Choose from the following reading suggestions, or select others from the Lectionary.
Readings of the day must be used if celebrating the liturgy on a Sunday in Advent, Christmas, Lent
or Easter.*

First Reading

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 40:1-11

God consoles his people.

Isaiah 60:1-6

All peoples will walk in your light.

Ezekiel 34:11-16

As a shepherd keeps all his flock in view, so shall I keep my sheep in view.

Hosea 2:16-17, 21-22

I will betroth you to me for ever.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 22

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Psalm 26

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Psalm 66:2-3, 5, 7-8

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

Psalm 95:1-3, 7-10

R. Proclaim his marvellous deeds to all the nations.

Psalm 117:22-23, 25-26, 28

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.

Psalm 144:1-2, 8-11, 13-14

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

Luke 1:47-55

R. The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

Second Reading

Philippians 3:8-14

All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings.

Romans 8:31, 38-39

Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

I never stop thanking God for you.

1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17

You are the temple of God.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Before the world was made, he chose us in Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Through the Lord, the whole building is bound together as one holy temple.

1 Peter 2:4-9

As living stones, you will be built into a spiritual temple.

Gospel Acclamation and Gospel

1.

Ezekiel 37:27

Alleluia, alleluia!

My dwelling place shall be with them, says the Lord, and I will be their God and they will be my people. Alleluia!

Matthew 6:25-34

Do not worry about tomorrow.

2.

John 6:63, 68

Alleluia, alleluia!

Your words, Lord, are spirit and life;
you have the words of everlasting life.
Alleluia!

John 4:19-24

True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

3.

John 15:9, 5

Alleluia, alleluia!

Remain in my love, says the Lord;
all who live in me and I in them will bear much fruit.
Alleluia!

John 15:1-8

All who live in me, and I in them, bear fruit.

4.

John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia!

I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life.
Alleluia!

John 20:19-23

As the Father sent me, so I send you: Receive the Holy Spirit.

5.

John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia!

I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
the one who follows me will have the light of life.

Alleluia!

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the light of the world.

6.

Mark 1:17

Alleluia, alleluia!

Come, follow me, says the Lord,
and I will make you fishers of my people.

Alleluia!

Mark 1:14-20

I will make you fishers of people.

7.

Matthew 4:19

Alleluia, alleluia!

Come follow me, says the Lord,
and I will make you fishers of my people.

Alleluia!

Luke 5:1-11

They left everything and followed him.

8.

cf Luke 24:32

Alleluia, alleluia!

Lord Jesus, make your word plain to us:
make our hearts burn with love when you speak.

Alleluia!

Luke 24:13-35

They recognised him at the breaking of the bread.

Homily

Presidential Chair

Reader 1 This chair has been the place
 where pastors of this community have proclaimed the word and
 celebrated the sacraments.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have presided in Christ's name
 and led this community of faith in loving service.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord Jesus, you are the good Shepherd
 who gathers the scattered sheep into one fold.
 Guide your people along the right path and lead us to our heavenly home.

**All Here we have been inspired with the word of truth.
 Here we have been called to serve.
 May we walk in your ways all the days of our life.**

Sung refrain

Prayers of Intercession

Presider Dear friends, confident that God is with us in times of joy and in times of trial, let
 us bring our prayers before the Lord.

- 1.** For the Pope and for our local bishop/s. May God bless them with the courage
 to lead the Church with wisdom, integrity and compassion. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

- 2.** For all who have faithfully served this community through preaching, teaching,
 prayer and pastoral care. May their example inspire us to loving service. In hope, we
 pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

- 3.** For the founders of this community, and for the generations of past parishioners who
 have given witness through their faith-filled and generous actions. May the seeds of
 faith sown here continue to bear lasting fruit. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

- 4.** For this community of faith, that we may have courage to move forward
 with confidence, trusting in the Lord's providence. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

5. For all those in Australia and beyond who are experiencing change and transition. May disappointment be eased, fear dispelled and new life flourish. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

6. For all those who have died, especially members of this parish community. Grant them a place at the table in God's heavenly kingdom. Lord hear us.

All Lord hear our prayer.

Presider Lord God, wherever two or three are gathered in your name you are there. Hear our prayer and give us the strength to continue living and working in your name wherever you choose to lead us. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Offerings

Altar

Reader 1 From this altar, the table of the Eucharist, we have been fed:
the table of our unity, a banquet of plenty,
and a source of the Spirit.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have gathered around this altar,
offered their gifts,
poured out their prayers
and shared in the banquet of the Lord.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord God, in the sharing of one Bread and Cup,
this altar has been a symbol of communion and peace.
We praise and thank you for the gift of your Son
whose Body and Blood we have received.

**All Here we have celebrated Christ's death and resurrection.
Here we have broken and shared the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.
May we be transformed into the likeness of Christ.**

Sung refrain

Prayer over the Offerings

The Eucharistic Prayer

Preface for the Dedication of a Church (RM 1285) or another from the Roman Missal.

The Communion Rite

Prayer after Communion

As the communion rite concludes and the assembly are singing the communion song, ministers remove the altar cloth and lighted altar candles.

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

Presider Gracious God, we give you thanks for the life of the Gospel in this community through the worship life in _____ church.

The following prayer might be prayed aloud by the whole assembly, or by several different readers from the parish who each take turns to read a section.

We give thanks for the Word proclaimed in Spirit and in Truth,
the prayers prayed,
the songs sung, the singers and the musicians,
the bread and the wine,
the water and the children,
the teachers and the preachers,
the confirmations & affirmations,
the marriages and the promises,
the funerals and the comfort,
the laughter, the tears, the hopes and the fears,
and the sighs too deep for words.

Such things turn a building into a house of worship.
Such things make the distance between heaven
and earth seem slight.

Lord we give thanks
that what has taken place in this house of worship
has sent ripples of hope into the community, things
we know of and much hidden from us,
yet signs nevertheless of your love that has led us out
to serve as we have been served
to love as we have been loved
to forgive as we have been forgiven
to trust that God has used us despite our shortcomings.

Today while we acknowledge the passing of the season
of this house of worship, we pray that your hand
will continue to guide us and bless us in the new season upon us.
Help us to be attentive to you, as we seek to serve you in this community.
In the quiet, we reflect on our time in this building
and we remember with gratitude those with whom we have shared and are no longer
with us...

(a moment of silence)

With a clear understanding that our God is not confined to buildings made by human hands, we the people of this church and community, grateful for our heritage and mindful of the sacrifices of those who have gone before, dedicate ourselves anew to the service of God in Spirit and Truth, and to the service of all people in the spirit of Christ, as we close this church of _____, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen

Prayer composed by Rev. Martin Stewart for the closure of St Stephen's in Christchurch, NZ. <https://marthrev.wordpress.com/2016/05/12/decommissioning-prayer/>

Or Hymn of Thanksgiving

Or Michael Weldon, *Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure*, Liturgical Press, 2004, p 203 or 214.

Or CCCB Sunday Celebrations of Word and Hours - Litany of Praise p 244

Or The Magnificat (*Luke 1:46-55*) (Lect Vol 1 p.89)

CONCLUDING RITES

Those participating in the final procession gather at the front, holding the processional cross and other devotional objects which will be part of the following prayer.

Cross and Devotional Objects

Reader 1 This Cross, these Stations, and these devotional objects
 have been a sign of protection, comfort and strength
 to the people of this community.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have spent time
 in prayerful contemplation before these objects,
 and fostered a love of Christ in their hearts.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord God,
 your Son reconciled us to you by suffering on the cross
 and then returned to you in glory.
 May your people who have looked upon these sacred objects
 shoulder their own crosses
 in the spirit of the Gospel until their journey ends.

All **Here we have bowed down in adoration.**
Here we have pondered Christ's saving love and mercy.
May the cross be our comfort in trouble,
our refuge in the face of danger,
our safeguard on life's journey.

Sung refrain

Presider Let us pray.
 Lord God, you are our refuge; our eternal home is in you.
 For _____ years, this church building of _____
 has been a source of grace and blessing.
 As we leave this place of worship,
 we thank you for all the blessings that you have given us.
 Protect us on our pilgrim journey and keep us faithful to you.
 Guide us to new places of worship,
 so that we may continue to give glory to your name.

 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
 Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
 Amen.

Solemn Blessing and Dismissal

Presider The Lord be with you.
All **And with your Spirit.**

Priest
or Deacon Bow down for the blessing.

Presider
(RM 714) May the Lord bless you and keep you.
 Amen.
 May he let his face shine upon you
 and show you his mercy.
 Amen.
 May he turn his countenance towards you
 and give you his peace.
 Amen.
 And may the blessing of almighty God,
 the Father, and the Son,+ and the Holy Spirit,
 come down on you and remain with you for ever.
 Amen.

Presider
(or Deacon) Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Recessional Song

If there is a parish banner, this can be carried out of the assembly in procession with the cross, candles, altar cloths, ministers, and presider.

As the people leave in procession, each member of the community may be invited to kiss the altar.

Ceremonial Departure and Closing of the Doors

Outside the Church

Presider With thanks to God for all the good accomplished here,
I declare the church of _____ now closed.

When the lights have been switched off and the doors and windows closed, people should be advised that the church is now closed. People should not re-enter the church. A sense of finality is important.

Some options might include a procession to another place, or a final song.

The Mass may also end in silence with parishioners invited to remain in the church for as long as they wish. After the last person exits the church, the doors are then locked.

Variations to the rites may be appropriate, especially after local circumstances and needs are considered carefully.

Reception

The procession could continue to the hall for a reception.

If there are church bells, they could be rung during this movement.

Displays of parish history, photographs, albums, and story-telling should continue to be shared.

A prayer card with important dates in the history of the parish, or perhaps a small bottle of holy water from the font would be meaningful gifts to send home with those present.

Additional speeches and addresses might be given at the reception.

Liturgy of the Word - Closure of a Church

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Hymn

Greeting

Presider In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen.

Presider Peace be with you.

All And with your spirit.

Or, if the Presider is not a Bishop,

Presider In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen.

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

All And with your spirit.

Introduction and Welcome

In these or similar words:

Presider This place carries many memories. For ___ years, people have been baptised in the waters of this font, and become part of the Christian community. Week by week we have gathered to give thanks to God. While there is sadness in the closing of this church, we are grateful for all that it has meant to us. Although this is our last celebration in this church, we will continue to hear God's Word and share the Lord's Table. Who we are in God's eyes and what we believe in, cannot be limited by human structures. In a spirit of gratitude, then, let us prepare our minds and hearts to celebrate these holy mysteries and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us boldly into a new future.

Sprinkling Rite or Penitential Rite

Sprinkling Rite

Presider We mark this occasion with the Sprinkling Rite since it recalls our baptism and membership of the family of God. Even as this church closes, we continue to be united through baptism, to every Catholic parish throughout the diocese, and indeed across the world. Let us ask God to bless this water.

Or:

Presider My brothers and sisters, this water will be used to remind us of our baptism. We remember all those baptised here, from the first person to be baptised in this church, *(name of person)* in *(year of baptism)*, to the last, *(name of person)* in *(year of baptism)*. Let us ask God to bless this water and keep us faithful to the Spirit he has given us.

After a brief silence, he joins his hands and continues:

God our Father,
you created water to make the fields fruitful
and to refresh and cleanse our bodies.
In baptism,
your gift of water washes away our sins and brings us eternal
life. We ask you to bless this water,
the source of purification,
as we seek forgiveness of our sins.
Renew the living well-spring of your grace within us
and protect us in spirit and body
as we come into your presence with hearts made clean
to receive your gift of salvation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Or: Blessing of Water A (RM 1507)

Dear sisters and brothers,
let us humbly beseech the Lord our God
to bless this water he has created, which
will be sprinkled on us
as a memorial of our Baptism.
May he help us by his grace
to remain faithful to the Spirit we have received.

Almighty ever-living God,
who willed that through water,
the fountain of life and the source of purification,
even souls should be cleansed
and receive the gift of eternal life;
be pleased, we pray, to + bless this water,
by which we seek protection on this your day, O Lord.
Renew the living spring of your grace within us
and grant that by this water we may be defended
from all ills of spirit and body,
and so approach you with hearts made clean
and worthily receive your salvation.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Presider sprinkles the gathered assembly while a hymn or chant is sung.

Presider Lord God,
 Creator and giver of life,
 we thank you for this water which we use in faith.
 Wash away the sin that divides us,
 make new life spring up within us,
 and lead us, whole and complete, into your presence
 to bless your glorious name.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Or

Penitential Act

Choose forms from the Roman Missal or compose your own, based on these forms.

Collect

Presider Let us pray.
 God our Father, through Christ your Son
 you have called your people to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
 Through the Holy Spirit,
 unite your people and lead us in your wisdom and truth.
 Help us to show forth the living presence of Christ in the world,
 and lead us in the ways of goodness and love.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
 Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

All Amen.

Or

Another appropriate Collect from the Roman Missal.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Choose from the following suggestions or select others from the Lectionary.

Readings of the day must be used if celebrating the liturgy on a Sunday in Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter.

First Reading

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 40:1-11

God consoles his people.

Isaiah 60:1-6

All peoples will walk in your light.

Ezekiel 34:11-16

As a shepherd keeps all his flock in view, so shall I keep my sheep in view.

Hosea 2:16-17, 21-22

I will betroth you to me for ever.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 22

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Psalm 26

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Psalm 66:2-3, 5, 7-8

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

Psalm 95:1-3, 7-10

R. Proclaim his marvellous deeds to all the nations.

Psalm 117:22-23, 25-26, 28

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.

Psalm 144:1-2, 8-11, 13-14

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

Luke 1:47-55

R. The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

Second Reading

Philippians 3:8-14

All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings.

Romans 8:31, 38-39

Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

I never stop thanking God for you.

1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17

You are the temple of God.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Before the world was made, he chose us in Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Through the Lord, the whole building is bound together as one holy temple.

1 Peter 2:4-9

As living stones, you will be built into a spiritual temple.

Gospel Acclamation and Gospel

1.

Ezekiel 37:27

Alleluia, alleluia!

My dwelling place shall be with them, says the Lord, and I will be their God and they will be my people. Alleluia!

Matthew 6:25-34

Do not worry about tomorrow.

2.

John 6:63, 68

Alleluia, alleluia!

Your words, Lord, are spirit and life;
you have the words of everlasting life.
Alleluia!

John 4:19-24

True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

3.

John 15:9, 5

Alleluia, alleluia!
Remain in my love, says the Lord;
all who live in me and I in them will bear much fruit.
Alleluia!

John 15:1-8

All who live in me, and I in them, bear fruit.

4.

John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life.
Alleluia!

John 20:19-23

As the Father sent me, so I send you: Receive the Holy Spirit.

5.

John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia!
I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
the one who follows me will have the light of life.
Alleluia!

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the light of the world.

6.

Mark 1:17

Alleluia, alleluia!
Come, follow me, says the Lord,
and I will make you fishers of my people.
Alleluia!

Mark 1:14-20

I will make you fishers of people.

7.

Matthew 4:19

Alleluia, alleluia!
Come follow me, says the Lord,
and I will make you fishers of my people.
Alleluia!

Luke 5:1-11

They left everything and followed him.

8

cf Luke 24:32

Alleluia, alleluia!
Lord Jesus, make your word plain to us:
make our hearts burn with love when you speak.
Alleluia!

Luke 24:13-35

They recognised him at the breaking of the bread.

Homily

Prayers of Intercession

Presider Dear friends, confident that God is with us in times of joy and in times of trial, let us bring our prayers before the Lord.

- 1.** For the Pope and for our local bishop/s. May God bless them with the courage to lead the Church with wisdom, integrity and compassion. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

- 2.** For all who have faithfully served this community through preaching, teaching, prayer and pastoral care. May their example inspire us to loving service. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

3. For the founders of this community, and for the generations of past parishioners who have given witness through their faith-filled and generous actions. May the seeds of faith sown here continue to bear lasting fruit. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

4. For this community of faith, that we may have courage to move forward with confidence, trusting in the Lord's providence. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

5. For all those in Australia and beyond who are experiencing change and transition. May disappointment be eased, fear dispelled and new life flourish. In hope, we pray.

All Lord hear our prayer.

6. For all those who have died, especially members of this parish community. Grant them a place at the table in God's heavenly kingdom. Lord hear us.

All Lord hear our prayer.

Presider Lord God, wherever two or three are gathered in your name you are there. Hear our prayer and give us the strength to continue living and working in your name wherever you choose to lead us. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

Presider Gracious God, we give you thanks for the life of the Gospel in this community through the worship life in _____ church.

The following prayer might be prayed aloud by the whole assembly, or by several different readers from the parish who each take turns to read a section.

We give thanks for the Word proclaimed in Spirit and in Truth,
the prayers prayed,
the songs sung, the singers and the musicians,
the bread and the wine,
the water and the children,
the teachers and the preachers,
the confirmations & affirmations,

the marriages and the promises,
the funerals and the comfort,
the laughter, the tears, the hopes and the fears,
and the sighs too deep for words.
Such things turn a building into a house of worship.
Such things make the distance between
heaven and earth seem slight.

Lord we give thanks
that what has taken place in this house of worship
has sent ripples of hope into the community, things
we know of and much hidden from us,
yet signs nevertheless of your love that has led us out
to serve as we have been served
to love as we have been loved
to forgive as we have been forgiven
to trust that God has used us despite our shortcomings.

Today while we acknowledge the passing of the season
of this house of worship, we pray that your hand
will continue to guide us and bless us in the new season upon us.
Help us to be attentive to you, as we seek to serve you in this community.
In the quiet, we reflect on our time in this building
and we remember with gratitude those with whom we have shared and are no longer
with us...

(a moment of silence)

With a clear understanding that our God is not confined to buildings made by human hands, we the people of this church and community, grateful for our heritage and mindful of the sacrifices of those who have gone before, dedicate ourselves anew to the service of God in Spirit and Truth, and to the service of all people in the spirit of Christ, as we close this church of _____, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen

Prayer composed by Rev. Martin Stewart for the closure of St Stephen's in Christchurch, NZ. <https://martherev.wordpress.com/2016/05/12/decommissioning-prayer/>

Or Hymn of Thanksgiving

Or Michael Weldon, *Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure*, Liturgical Press, 2004, p 203 or 214.

Or CCCB Sunday Celebrations of Word and Hours - Litany of Praise p 244

Or The Magnificat (*Luke 1:46-55*) (Lect Vol 1 p.89)

Prayer over Church Spaces

The assembly moves together to each of these places in the church in turn.

A musical refrain is sung by the assembly after the prayers at each place.

The refrain might be chosen from the following suggestions, or a suitable alternative used instead.

My soul rejoices in God, my Saviour CWBII 212

Tell out, my soul (one verse each time) CWBII 213

I will bless you all my life, Lord CWBII 182

In Faith and Hope and Love CWBII 520

In the Lord, I'll Be Ever Thankful CWBII 522

My Peace be Upon You Forever CWBII 558

Sing Praise to the Lord all our Days CWBII 602

Baptismal Font

Reader 1 This baptismal font
has been the place of rebirth. By water and the Holy Spirit
we have received new life and become God's own children.

Reader 2 We pray for all who have been baptised in this saving font,
that, by their way of life, they may continue to give glory to God's name.

Pause for silent prayer.

Presider Lord God,
You have created us in your own image
and sanctified us through baptism.
You have been the source of hope for your people.
Make us always and everywhere conscious of your gift
and of our Christian dignity.

**All Here we have professed our faith in the presence of the community.
Here our sins have been forgiven.
May we grow in union with Christ and rise to new life in him.**

Sung refrain

Presidential Chair

Reader 1 This chair has been the place
where pastors of this community have proclaimed the word
and celebrated the sacraments.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have presided in Christ's name
and led this community of faith in loving service.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord Jesus, you are the good Shepherd
who gathers the scattered sheep into one fold.
Guide your people along the right path and lead us to our heavenly home.

**All Here we have been inspired with the word of truth.
Here we have been called to serve.
May we walk in your ways all the days of our life.**

Sung refrain

Ambo

Reader 1 From this place, the word of God has been proclaimed.
We have listened, we have responded.
At this table we have been nourished by the word of life.

Reader 2 We pray for all the faithful who have gathered around this table
and received the Word in their hearts.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider O God, your word is spirit and life
and the lamp that guides our feet.
Stir in us your Holy Spirit to enflame our hearts
to live the good news.

**All Here we have been nourished by the living word.
Here we have heard Christ speak to us not as strangers but as friends.
May the Word of God truly become for us spirit and life.**

Sung refrain

Altar

Reader 1 From this altar, the table of the Eucharist, we have been fed:
the table of our unity, a banquet of plenty,
and a source of the Spirit.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have gathered around this altar,
offered their gifts,
poured out their prayers
and shared in the banquet of the Lord.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord God, in the sharing of one Bread and Cup,
this altar has been a symbol of communion and peace.
We praise and thank you for the gift of your Son
whose Body and Blood we have received.

**All Here we have celebrated Christ's death and resurrection.
Here we have broken and shared the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.
May we be transformed into the likeness of Christ.**

Sung refrain

Cross and Devotional Objects

Reader 1 This Cross, these Stations, and these devotional objects
have been a sign of protection, comfort and strength
to the people of this community.

Reader 2 We pray for those who have spent time
in prayerful contemplation before these objects,
and fostered a love of Christ in their hearts.

Pause for silent prayer

Presider Lord God,
your Son reconciled us to you by suffering on the cross
and then returned to you in glory.
May your people who have looked upon these sacred objects
shoulder their own crosses
in the spirit of the Gospel until their journey ends.

**All Here we have bowed down in adoration.
Here we have pondered Christ's saving love and mercy.
May the cross be our comfort in trouble,
our refuge in the face of danger,
our safeguard on life's journey.**

Sung refrain

The Lord's Prayer

Sign of Peace

CONCLUDING RITES

Let us pray.

Lord God, you are our refuge; our eternal home is in you.

For _____ years, this church building of _____
has been a source of grace and blessing.

As we leave this place of worship,
we thank you for all the blessings that you have given us.
Protect us on our pilgrim journey and keep us faithful to you.
Guide us to new places of worship,
so that we may continue to give glory to your name.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Solemn Blessing and Dismissal

Presider	The Lord be with you.
All	And with your Spirit.

Priest or Deacon	Bow down for the blessing.
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Presider (RM 714)	May the Lord bless you and keep you. Amen. May he let his face shine upon you and show you his mercy. Amen. May he turn his countenance towards you and give you his peace. Amen. And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son,+ and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever. Amen.
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Presider (or Deacon)	Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.
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All	Thanks be to God
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Recessional Song

If there is a parish banner, this can be carried out of the assembly in procession with the cross, candles, altar cloths, ministers, and presider.

As the people leave in procession, each member of the community may be invited to kiss the altar.

Ceremonial Departure and Closing of the Doors

Outside the Church

Presider With thanks to God for all the good accomplished here,
I declare the church of _____ now closed.

When the lights have been switched off and the doors and windows closed, people should be advised that the church is now closed. People should not re-enter the church. A sense of finality is important.

Some options might include a procession to another place, or a final song.

The Mass may also end in silence with parishioners invited to remain in the church for as long as they wish. After the last person exits the church, the doors are then locked.

Variations to the rites may be appropriate, especially after local circumstances and needs are considered carefully.

Reception

The procession could continue to the hall for a reception.

If there are church bells, they could be rung during this movement.

Displays of parish history, photographs, albums, and story-telling should continue to be shared.

A prayer card with important dates in the history of the parish, or perhaps a small bottle of holy water from the font would be meaningful gifts to send home with those present.

Additional speeches and addresses might be given at the reception.

Liturgy of Lament – Closure of a Church

The following ritual might be considered shortly after the announcement of an impending church closure. It is based on the Ritual of Lament proposed by Fr David Caron in “A Ritual Response to Church Closure: A Pastoral Challenge” in Liturgical Ministry 14 (Winter 2005), 27-35.

The community members gather to express their grief while looking forward in the hope of experiencing healing. The liturgy needs to balance the tension between these two realities, conscious that participation in the paschal mystery can transform grief into hope. The choice of music should allow aspects of the paschal mystery to be interwoven throughout the ritual. The liturgy should be characterised by noble simplicity.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

(Please stand)

Entrance Hymn

Greeting

Presider In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen.

Presider Peace be with you.

All And with your spirit.

or, if the Presider is not a Bishop,

Presider In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen.

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

All And with your spirit.

Collect (adapted from *The Order of Christian Funerals* 399.7)

Presider Let us pray.

Most merciful God,
whose wisdom is beyond our understanding,
surround the family of *(name of church)* with your
love, that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss,
but have confidence in your goodness,
and strength to meet the days to come.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

(Please sit)

LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading

Wisdom 11:22 – 12:2

You have mercy on all things because you love everything that exists.

Jeremiah 14:17-22

Remember, Lord, do not break your covenant with us.

Lamentations 3:22-26

It is good to wait in silence for the Lord to save.

Romans 8:18-30

We know that by turning everything to their good, God co-operates with all those who love him.

Ephesians 2:19-22

You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its cornerstone.

1 Peter 2:4-10

As living stones, you will be built into a spiritual temple.

1 John 3:1-2

We shall see God as he really is.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 22

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Ps 24

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

Ps 24: 4-10, 14

R. Remember your mercies, O Lord.

Ps 27:1, 13-14

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Ps 61:2-3, 6-9

R. Rest in God alone, my soul.

Ps 62:2-6

R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord, my God.

Ps 91:1-2, 10-11

R. Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

(Please stand)

Gospel Acclamation and Gospel

1.

Cf John 14:18

Alleluia, alleluia!

The Lord said: I will not leave you orphans.

I will come back to you, and your hearts will rejoice.

Alleluia!

John 14:1-6

There are many rooms in my Father's house.

2.

Cf Jn 6:63, 68

Alleluia, alleluia!

Your words, Lord, are spirit and life;

you have the words of everlasting life.

Alleluia!

John 6:60-69

Lord, to whom shall we go?

3.

Cf Matthew 11:25

Alleluia, alleluia!

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;

you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.

Alleluia!

Matthew 11:25-30

Childlike confidence in the goodness of God will bring us the 'rest' that only Jesus can give.

4.

John 20:29

Alleluia, alleluia!

You believe in me, Thomas, because you have seen me;

happy are those who have not seen me, but still believe!

Alleluia!

John 20:19-21

After eight days, Jesus came and stood among them.

5.

Cf Luke 24:32

Alleluia, alleluia!

Lord Jesus, make your word plain to us:
make our hearts burn with love when you speak.
Alleluia!

Luke 24:13-35

They recognised him at the breaking of the bread.

6.

John 12:26

Alleluia, alleluia!

If you serve me, follow me, says the Lord;
and where I am, my servant will also be.
Alleluia!

John 12:23-28

If a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it yields a rich harvest.

(Please sit)

Homily

A brief homily could address the importance of the community members coming together to express their feelings of grief and loss before God, who walks with them at this time. The homily could emphasise the great desire of God to listen, comfort, heal and offer hope in Christ.

Veneration of the Cross

Presider In our sufferings, we join ourselves to Christ.
 May pardon come,
 comfort be given
 holy faith increase
 and everlasting redemption be made secure.

All Amen.

All are now invited to come forward to venerate the cross that has been used by this community during Good Friday liturgies.

After the veneration:

Presider May God have mercy on us and bless us;
 may he let his face shed its light upon us
 and have mercy on us.

All Amen.

RITUAL OF LAMENT

Presider:

(in these or similar words)

My dear friends, we know that whenever we gather together in Christ's name, Christ is with us.
Let us seek to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit through our community's story.
May we be guided by God's wisdom when the way is not clear.
May any divisions in our hearts, communities and families be healed.
Let us spend time with the Lord and with each other.

I invite you to be attentive to the memories of the community made present in this sacred place and briefly share these with one another.

Members of the community are invited to briefly name their memories, their grief or sense of loss following the decision to close the church.

Period of Silence

Litany

(Please kneel)

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Holy Mary, Mother of God, **pray for us.**

Saint Michael, **pray for us.**

Holy Angels of God, **pray for us.**

Saint John the Baptist, **pray for us.**

Saint Joseph, **pray for us.**

All holy apostles, **pray for us.**

(Saint of the local church), **pray for us.**

(Other local saints), **pray for us.**

Saint Mary of the Cross, **pray for us.**

All holy men and women, Saints of God, **pray for us.**

Lord, be merciful, **Lord, deliver us, we pray.**

From all evil, **Lord, deliver us, we pray.**

From every sin, **Lord, deliver us, we pray.**

From everlasting death, **Lord, deliver us, we pray.**

By your Incarnation, **Lord, deliver us, we pray.**

By your Death and Resurrection, **Lord, deliver us, we pray.**

By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, **Lord, deliver us, we pray.**

Be merciful to us sinners, **Lord, we ask you, hear our prayer.**

Govern and protect your holy Church, **Lord, we ask you, hear our prayer.**

Bring all peoples together in peace and true harmony, **Lord, we ask you, hear our prayer.**

Comfort with your mercy the troubled and the afflicted, **Lord, we ask you, hear our prayer.**

Strengthen all of us and keep us in your holy service, **Lord, we ask you, hear our prayer.**

Jesus, Son of the living God, **Lord, we ask you, hear our prayer.**

Christ, hear us. **Christ, hear us.**

Christ, graciously hear us. **Christ, graciously hear us.**

(Please stand)

The Lord's Prayer

Presider: Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

CONCLUDING RITES

The Solemn Blessings or Prayers over the People as provided on pp 709-726 of the Roman Missal may be used. The example chosen here is the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time IV (RM 716).

Presider Bow down for the blessing.

May the God of all consolation order your days in his peace
and grant you the gifts of his blessing.

Amen.

May he free you always from every distress
and confirm your hearts in his love.

Amen.

So that on this life's journey
you may be effective in good works,
rich in the gifts of hope, faith and charity,
and may come happily to eternal life.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son,+ and the Holy Spirit,
come down on you and remain with you for ever.

Amen.

Concluding Hymn

Following the ritual of lament, refreshments could be served in the parish hall, in the vestibule of the church or in another suitable venue. The provision of such hospitality is an important sign of support and care for the parish community.

Liturgy Notes

Ritual of Lament

All participants in the liturgy are advised to limit their contribution to one or two phrases so that all those present who wish to speak might have an opportunity to do so. People are asked not to respond to what is spoken by other members of the community.

Prior to the liturgy, one or two members of the community might prepare a response and speak first to encourage others to follow.

Participants might speak spontaneously or use formulas such as:

At this time of closure, I feel....

A memory of particular importance to me is...

I feel grateful for...

A microphone might be used in designated locations, or people might stand in their place.

Adequate time is required for members of the assembly to grieve publicly and to enter into this time of reflection.

Litany

This litany is based on the Litany of Saints, Easter Vigil Chant version (*Roman Missal p 406*). It is desirable that this text is sung, but it may be recited.

[Click here](#) for the print version.

[Click here](#) for a sample audio version.

It is appropriate to stand for the Litany during the Easter season and to kneel at other times of the liturgical year.

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