

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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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.

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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