

# **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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# 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...

**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.*