

Full Service – A Ritual for Those Left After a Difficult Ministerial Separation

Gathering

The congregation gathers in a fellowship hall or similar venue. At the center of a circle of chairs is a small table with scraps of paper, twigs, and dried leaves, as well as a small paper box.

Call to Worship

Leader 1: God be with you

People: And also with you

Leader 1: Lift up your hearts

People: We lift them up to God.

Song

Creator, we adore you, lay our lives before you.

How we love you.

Jesus, we adore you, lay our lives before you.

How we love you.

Spirit, we adore you, lay our lives before you.

How we love you.

Introduction

Leader 2: We gather to collect these last [number] years and offer them to God. Our season with [pastor's name] was both wonderful and sad. His/her presence benefited us and hindered us. He/she brought gifts and also burdens. We shared joy and laughter as well as frustration and anger.

Leader 1: We were to him/her both blessing and curse. We were friend and adversary. We gave him/her much and not enough. There was growth and good in our time together. There was brokenness in our relationship. Now we must lay aside the weight of that time, and any sin which still clings close, so that we may turn to "run with patience the race that is set before us."

Confession

Leader 1: Let us pray.

People: Savior, we lay ourselves before you.

You know our hearts and our thoughts.

You see our failings and our brokenness.

At times we did the best we could, and it was not enough.

At times our mutual weakness prevailed.

**Together, we have failed to be all that you desired of us.
Forgive us, forgive [pastor's name], and empower us to forgive each other.
Heal [pastor's name], heal us, and grant grace to [pastor's family names].
Help us each to offer up these times;
so that we may run your race. Amen.**

Collecting our Times

Introduction

Leader 3: We gather to grieve the good and the bad,
to acknowledge positive times, and to name negative ones.
We come together to hand over this period with [pastor name]
and with each other.
We bring all our experiences, in all their complexity, to surrender them to God.
May God gather them all into God's heart as God has gathered [pastor],
[pastor's] family, and us.

Instructions

Leader 4: We have provided small scraps of paper and other fragile objects. We invite you to choose among them one or two to symbolize your experience with [pastor] and with this congregation during his/her tenure: Let them represent joyful remembrances, difficult disagreements, feelings of affection, feelings of anger and betrayal, times of personal importance shared, opportunities for ministry missed, gifts blessed or gifts rejected, failings forgiven or quarrels reconciled, talks, sermons, walks, bicycle rides, children's songs, meals. Anything you hold from this time.
Please place your selected objects into this small paper box as a sign of offering them to God. You may do so silently or make a brief statement as you do so.

Collection

During a time of silence, each participant may select an object from the table and, either silently or with a few words, place it in the paper box.

Procession

A team of leaders takes the box of collected memories and invites the congregation to join them in the parking lot where a metal fire pit waits.

Offering

The people gather around the fire pit.

Leader 2: Savior, our times are in your hands. We make them an offering to you.

People: We offer these feelings, these memories, these moments to you.

The leaders place the box in the fire and light it as an offering to God. When the box has been burned, the ashes are collected and mixed with fresh earth.

Leader 4: The times we had with [pastor name] must be left behind, but they remain part of us. [Pastor name] is part of us and we are part of him/her. As these ashes of our time together join the soil to grow with these plants, so our common history will feed our life as we turn to grow into the future.

The congregation takes pinches of the soil-ash mixture to scatter among the flower beds, saying whatever words of farewell feel appropriate.

Leader 3: God, into your hands we commend our times. Into your hands we commend our brother/sister [pastor name]. Into your hands we commend his/her family. Into your hands we commend ourselves.

Leader 1: God, bless us and keep us all. Make your face shine upon us. Lift up your countenance upon us all. And grant in this ending, peace to [pastor name], peace to his/her family, and peace to each of us. Amen.

The congregation proceeds to the sanctuary.

Anointing

The congregation makes a circle around a small table with a pitcher of oil, four small bowls, a candle, and a Bible.

Introit

Leader 1: Lift up your hearts

People: We lift them up to God

Leader 1: Give thanks to God

People: It is good to give our thanks and praise.

Leader 1: *(Lifting the Bible)* This Bible represents wisdom for the future.

Leader 2: *(Lighting the candle)* This candle represents God's light to lead us.

Leader 3: *(Holding up the pitcher of oil)* This oil will bless us for the work to come.

Blessing

One leader anoints those who have led the congregation during the transition (e.g. elder's, council chair). Oil is then poured into small bowls and the leaders bless remaining people in leadership. Then all people present are invited to receive anointing.

Leader 2: Hear the words of the Apostle Paul: “This is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9-11)

Closing Worship

Closing Blessing

Leader 1: The Creator go with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader 1: The Spirit guard and keep you.

People: And guard and keep you.

Leader 1: Christ’s peace be with you.

People: And also with you.

Benediction Song

“My Life Flows On” HWB 580

The people depart.

Ken White and John Linscheid (USA) From *Along the Arc*. ©2017 Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBTQ Interests.
[Creative Commons: Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International \(CC BY-4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)