



The Deconsecration of a Sacred Space

*Rites and Prayers Supplemental to
The Book of Alternative Services
of The Anglican Church of Canada*

The Deconsecration of a Sacred Space

Introduction

Many different circumstances lead to the decision to close the house of worship of a parish community. By the time the act of deconsecration takes place, the proper discernment of the diocesan leadership and parish involved has taken place. These processes can be difficult for all involved. When well-supported, they can also be healthy, formative times in which a local worshipping community discovers a new and renewed sense of discipleship and mission, embodied in different ways.

But there is always grief. The act of secularization is both a ritual act that returns the set apart nature of the building to general use. It is also a pastoral act of closure and new beginning that refocuses the identity of a community in palpable ways that involve processes of grieving. The imprint of years of worship and service is made upon our church buildings, sanctuaries and meeting spaces. The identity of the community, its common life of prayer and mission can be bound up with the bricks and mortar. We know that “the church” is not the building, and yet these buildings can be vehicles of grace for us in unfathomable and sacramental ways.

Pastoral attentiveness is necessary to lead the liturgical marking of this transition. Care should be taken to involve the parish leadership in significant ways that allow the fuller story of the community to be symbolized and expressed. The liturgy ought to take place within a context that allows for community gathering and story telling both before and after the liturgy. Symbolic acts can accompany the rite, such as the ritual handing of holy objects from the building to the parish wardens and other lay leaders in trust, which can speak of a particularly poignant entrusting of the past into the care and responsibility of the living. Where possible, the physical moving from the former church building to the new context of worship – carrying holy items if possible - can be a profound way of marking the transition after the time of deconsecration.

In the case where the building being deconsecrated has no active worshipping community, the rite may focus more narrowly on thanksgiving for the past witness of the congregation in the community it served, whilst being rooted in the living worshipping family that is the whole diocese.

This liturgy is to be considered a diocesan service and is normally presided over by the diocesan bishop. This is not to be viewed as though it is an outsider coming in and making decisions for the parish, but rather is a profound symbol of the fact that the diocesan family – the wider church around this particular local worshipping community – is just that: a family in which all are affected by this local change, and all are bound in mutual love and common

discipleship. The bishop is as much a part of this congregation as all others, and serves as symbol of our common life in Christ.

It is important to find ways to recognize the role of the church building within the wider neighbourhood and community, and to address the gratitude and loss that may be felt in that wider community outside of the membership in the church.

Efforts to promote the liturgical occasion as a diocesan event are to be encouraged – the congregation should not be alone at this time, but should be surrounded by reminders that they are part of a much wider worshipping community bound in communion with each other in spiritual as well as in very real and tangible ways

Concerning the Service

This rite is designed to take place within the context of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It is normally presided over by the diocesan bishop or their representative, usually a regional or suffragan bishop or an archdeacon. It may also be adjusted to be used within a Service of the Word. The Act of Deconsecration and Prayers conclude the liturgy, within the act of Sending Forth. The question of when to offer such a liturgy often depends upon factors outside of the control of the church. If possible, it is preferable to choose a time on the liturgical calendar that speaks to renewal – such as in the Season of Easter or in early Pentecost – or in some other way has particular significance to the local community. The liturgy should reflect the ethos and leadership of the community, particularly in terms of the lay leadership in spoken and symbolic roles.

A deacon may have a particularly important role in this service, as symbol of the church at the threshold of church-and-world, whose role involves calling the church out into discipleship and mission, and reminding the church of the needs of the world outside the building. This role is best served by a deacon based within the parish, but, as a diocesan service, with the symbolism of diakonia particularly helpful, a deacon associated with the cathedral or other parish may be assigned the normal diaconal roles within the liturgy, and may also lead a procession out of the church upon final departure.

Liturgy for the Deconsecration of a Sacred Space

The Gathering

The bishop or their designate may address the congregation following the Opening Dialogue in these or similar words:

Presider This Eucharist which we celebrate today,
is offered to the Glory of God
with prayer and thanksgiving
for this parish and for all the sacred moments
that have been celebrated in this church building;
we hold before God
all who have supported the life and work of the gospel in this place,
and particularly those who through sacrifice and generosity
have built and added to this church building which has
served this community through the years;
and we pray for this congregation in their journey ahead

The service continues with the remainder of the Gathering Rite and Liturgy of the Word.

The Gelasian Prayer for the Church is appropriate to be used as the Collect of the Day. If the Collect appointed for the day is appropriate, it may follow this prayer:

Presider O God of unchangeable power and eternal light,
look favourably on your whole church,
that wonderful and sacred mystery;
and by the peaceful operation of your providence,
carry out the work of our salvation.
And let the whole world feel and see
that things which were cast down are being raised up,
and things which had grown old are being made new,
and all things are returning to perfection
through him from whom they took their origin;
even Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Or

Presider: O God, from living and chosen stones
you prepare an everlasting dwelling place for your majesty.
Grant that in the power of the Holy Spirit
those who serve you may always be kept within your presence.

This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives, and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and forever.

All **Amen.**

The Celebration of The Holy Eucharist continues to the Prayer After Communion, after which the following Act of Thanksgiving Remembrance may be used, or one of the Forms provided in the Appendix. Alternatively, this Act may take the place of, or augment, the Prayers of the People.

Act of Thanksgiving and Remembrance

The presider moves to address the congregation from the centre of the community, from the place from which the Gospel is proclaimed and the Prayers of the People are offered in the midst of the congregation. A symbolic group of leaders from the may accompany the presider if appropriate and if space allows. The presider then says the following, or one of the forms in the Appendix, or words with similar intent as appropriate for the community:

Presider We who are gathered here know that this building, which has been consecrated and set apart for the ministry of God’s holy word and sacraments, will no longer be used in this way. Let us offer our thanks for God’s work through this building.

The presider’s party moves to the font

Presider We thank you, our Redeemer God, for the water of baptism.
 In it we are buried with Christ in his death.
 By it we share in his resurrection.
 Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.

All **May all those who have been baptized in this place
 live as people made new by your Spirit. Amen.**

*The font cover is replaced, or, if freestanding, the font-bowl is removed.
 The presider’s party moves to the Altar.*

Presider Generous God, here at this table we have gathered to be fed with the body and blood of your own Jesus Christ.

All **May we who have shared his body, live his risen life.
 We, who have shared his cup, bring life to others.
 We, whom the Spirit lights, give light to the world.
 May we who have been fed by Christ
 be filled with his grace and blessing. Amen.**

The altar is stripped of cloths, candles and cross, and the presider moves to the Chancel steps.

Presider Gracious God, through your life-giving Spirit you have confirmed your people in their Baptismal vows. Here you have blessed those who have come to be united in marriage. Here you have received our beloved dead whom we commend to you, and here you have commissioned ministers for your purpose in this community.

All **May your Spirit be always with your people that they may know your power and your love. Amen.**

The procession moves to the Lectern.

Presider God of all Wisdom, your eternal Word speaks to us through the words of Holy Scripture. Here we have read of your mighty acts and purposes in history and here we have learned about those whom you have chosen to be agents of your will.

All **May we always seek to hear and follow your word. Amen.**

The Bible is taken off the lectern.

Other parts of the sanctuary which have carried strong meaning for the congregation, such as a prayer corner or votive candle stand or children's area may be recognized in similar fashion with prayers of thanksgiving.

Items removed may be entrusted symbolically to parish leaders who will at the end of the service recess from the building with them, towards their temporary storage area or the new worship space. If appropriate, the waters from the font may be used as asperges on the congregation at their departure from the building, as a reminder of God's promise of constant presence enlivening the community in their baptismal calling.

Act of Deconsecration

The service continues with the Doxology, following which the Presider addresses the congregation with these or similar words:

Presider To many of you this building has been hallowed by cherished memories, and we know that some will suffer a sense of loss. We pray that all will be comforted by the knowledge that the presence of God is not tied to any place or building.

[The Altar(s) and Font have been removed and protected. It is the intention of the Diocese that the congregation which worshiped here will not be deprived of the ministry of Word and Sacrament.]

The official Diocesan Decree - Deed, Declaration, or Sentence of Deconsecration or Secularization – is read by the Bishop, a church warden or one appointed. (The following is an example, only)

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

[On the day of, in the year of our Lord by N.N., [Arch]bishop of, this building was duly dedicated and consecrated [in honour of] and named The Sentence of Consecration has been in effect until this present date. I,, Bishop of, do hereby revoke the said Sentence [issued by], and do remit this building, and all objects remaining in it, for any lawful and reputable use, according to the laws of this land. This building, having now been declared deconsecrated and secularized, I declare to be no longer subject to my episcopal jurisdiction. This Declaration, which is to be publicly proclaimed before witnesses gathered at the said building, is given under my hand and seal, in in the Province of, on this day of, in the year of our Lord two thousand and]

A respectful pause is held. The presider then turns to address the assembly, in orans position.

Presider The Lord be with you.
All **And also with you.**
Presider Let us pray.

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

Holy and living God,
you have gifted us with your presence in this place.
Over and again you have called us to be refreshed by your Holy Spirit
in the baptismal waters that pour from this font.
Time and again you have fed us at this table
with the bread of life and the wine of the age to come.
You who are beyond time and space
have made yourself known in the daily life of this community.
You who lead us to life abundant will never leave us orphaned:
May our hearts be glad for all that you have given,
and anticipate with joy the new ways you call us forth.
May we be strong in the knowledge that you go before us

to prepare our true home in Christ.
This we ask through Jesus, our saviour and friend.

All **Amen.**

Help us, steadfast God, as we pray and live for your new creation,
that among the swift and varied changes of this world,
our hearts may surely be fixed where true joys are found,
in your promise of new life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Or:

Presider

Let us pray.
Holy and Almighty God,
in your great goodness you once accepted
to your honor and glory this building, now secularized:
Receive our praise and thanksgiving
for the blessings, help, and comfort
which you bestowed upon your people in this place.
Continue, we pray, your many mercies in your Church,
that we may be conscious at all times of your unchanging love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

Or:

Presider

O Lord God,
who so in thy great goodness didst accept
as a dwelling place for thine honour this building:
receive, we pray thee, our praises and thanksgivings
for the blessings, help, and comfort
which thou hast bestowed upon thy people
through the ministrations in this place.
Grant that they may never pass
from the hearts and lives of those who have received them.
Continue in greater measure, we beseech thee,
thy manifold mercies in the church building
in which this congregation will now worship,
that we may be ever conscious of thy unchanging love.
Hear this our prayer, for Jesus Christ's sake.

All **Amen.**

Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our prayers,

and dispose the way of your servants
towards the attainment of everlasting salvation;
that among the swift and varied changes of this world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed
where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Presider The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make their face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up their countenance upon you, and give you peace.

All **Amen.**

Or:

Presider May God bless us and keep us.
May God's face shine upon us with grace.
May God hold us in divine regard, and give us peace.

All **Amen.**

The presider blesses the people and all depart in peace.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Acts of Thanksgiving (additional)

It is appropriate to offer these prayers immediately preceding the Act of Deconsecration, or in the place of, or to augment, the Prayers of the People.

Form 1

Presider We give thanks for the ministry of the people of ... over its (long) history, and for all who have been fed and nurtured here in the faith of Jesus Christ.
Even as we mark the ending of an era in this place, we acknowledge how we all are participants in God's mission that continues beyond this day and beyond these walls.

As we gather here, may we come before God's presence with thanksgiving for the grace bestowed upon us and upon our forebears, saying, 'Blessed be God forever.'

Presider For the baptisms celebrated here.

All **Blessed be God forever.**

Presider For the power of God’s word proclaimed in scripture, in preaching, and in action.

All **Blessed be God forever.**

Presider For the prayers said for healing, and for those who have come for comfort.

All **Blessed be God forever.**

Presider For those times in which many were forgiven, comforted, and consoled here.

All **Blessed be God forever.**

Presider For the times many gathered here for Holy Communion;
for the Easters, Sundays, and holy days;
for the confirmations, feasts of saints and martyrs celebrated here;
for the marriages witnessed here,
and the funerals held here in comfort and in Christian hope.

All **Blessed be God forever.**

Presider For all clergy who have served this parish.

All **Blessed be God forever.**

Presider For all lay leaders who have served this parish

All **Blessed be God forever.**

Presider Ever present God, watchful and caring, our source and our end;
we with the saints of generations past have come to praise your name
and give thanks for the gifts of grace received in this building.

All **Blessed be God forever.**

Presider All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

All **Amen.**

Form 2

Those who are able are invited to remain standing, others may sit. The Bishop, deacon, priest, and other symbolic leaders proceed through the church offering prayers of thanksgiving. For the prayers in the nave, it is desirable to have the role of Leader shared amongst the lay leaders and clergy of the parish.

At the doors to the Nave:

Presider God of abundant Grace,
through this doorway we have entered your sanctuary,

a place of refuge where we have been nourished and fed,
healed and restored, forgiven and blessed.
And, through this doorway we have returned into your world,
sent as servants of your peace and justice.

All **For the many ways in which you call us into your life of humility and service, we thank you, Lord.**

At the font:

Presider God of eternal Life,
at this font we enter into the mystery
of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.
Through the waters of baptism we rise with Christ,
reborn by the Spirit becoming a sign of your promise for all people.

All: **For the many ways in which you give us new life, we thank you, Lord.**

In the midst of the nave:

Presider God of never-ending Mercy,
you call us together as your people to pray.
Hear now our prayers of thanksgiving for this parish family of N.

Leader For your presence whenever two or three have gathered together in your name,
All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For this place where we have been still and known that you are God,
All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For making us your children by adoption and grace, and refreshing us day by day with the bread of life,
All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For the knowledge of your will and the grace to perform it,
All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For your forgiveness and healing of our sin and brokenness, and for the comfort of your Holy Spirit,
All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For the blessing of our vows and the crowning of our years with your goodness,
All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For the founders of this holy house, and all who have ever entered here in faith

All and reverence,
We thank you, Lord.

Leader For all who have served here, lay leaders and clergy, those who have shared through the years in the ministry and mission of this congregation, in ways known and unknown,

All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For the church throughout the world, and particularly for the family of Christians who gather in the churches of [*N: this deanery or area*]

All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For N, our Primate, N, our Bishop, for those of our diocesan family who have gathered in this place tonight, and for your people in every place and in every land,

All **We thank you, Lord.**

Leader For those of our community not present in person with us in this time of remembrance and thanksgiving

All **We thank you, Lord.**

Presider God of all Faithfulness,
 your Spirit prays for us when we are unable to even utter simple words.

All **For the many ways in which you sustain us through prayer, we thank you, Lord.**

At the lectern:

Presider God of divine wisdom,
 your word reveals your promises,
 reassuring us with your hope, and challenging us with your truth.
 By your word, the depth of your love for all of creation is proclaimed
 and your desire for our lives is made known.

All **For the many ways in which your word speaks to us, we thank you, Lord.**

At the altar:

Presider God of infinite Love,
 at this table bread and wine are offered,
 blessed, broken and returned to us.
 As we give thanks at the Eucharist,
 you strengthen us for the journeys that lie ahead.

All that we have and are is brought to this place.
All that we can be and become is given in return.

All **For the many ways in which you feed us by your grace, we thank you, Lord.**

Presider God of all Mercy and Compassion,
 you have heard the prayers
 of your faithful people;
 those that we dare to speak aloud,
 those that remain in the silence of our hearts.
 Answer our prayers as may be best for us
 and for your kingdom,
 for we ask in the name of your Son,
 Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

All **Amen.**