

## Liturgy for a Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse

*DEDICATED TO M.E. WHO ASKED AND HOPEFULLY HAS NOW FOUND*

*by Betty Lynn Schwab*

This liturgy is intended for survivors seeking recognition of and healing for the harm child abuse does to a survivor's faith life and soul. It assumes the victim has been in counselling for some time and has achieved a degree of mental and emotional health. It would be premature to use the liturgy before such a point has been reached in an individual's healing process.

This liturgy also assumes that there have been adequate pastoral conversations about the survivor's faith, allowing her to unpack her thoughts about God (Why didn't God stop him? Was it God's will? Is this my cross to bear? Do I have to forgive him?) and ensuring the survivor's faith is an integrated, healthy Christianity.

It is important that these resources be adapted to each context and personalized as much as possible. Because the majority of child sex abuse survivors are women, the pronoun "she" is used throughout, but can be easily changed to "he." There is a variety of names for God used in this service, and these need to be adjusted to reflect the faith of each person. The liturgy also refers to a wide range of the gifts of grace, and this range may be narrowed to that which fits each context, ensuring that the yearning of each participant (for peace, reconciliation, wisdom, love) is named, recognized, and lifted up throughout the service.

Two actions may accompany the liturgy: the blessing of a symbolic object (e.g., necklace, cross, Bible chosen by the individual) that is meaningful to her; and/or the anointing with oil as a tangible gesture of healing, hope, and peace. Laying on of hands may be included after the anointing or used instead of the other suggested actions.

This service is intended to be used for one person at a time with her minister or pastoral counsellor. It requires adapting from "she" and "her" to "we" and "our" for use with a small group.

Depending on the context, it may be meaningful to include a Eucharistic celebration before the closing prayer as suggested below, using resources familiar to the survivor and her congregation.

In order for this liturgy to be meaningful, do it slowly! As appropriate, allow for moments throughout the service for silence in which the participant(s) might reflect on and rest in God's love.

## The Gathering

### Blessing of the Moment

May the God of love who calls you “good,”  
and the peace of Christ that is beyond our understanding,  
and the cleansing Spirit of freedom and power,  
be with you now.

**And also with you.**

### Opening Prayer

We have come to this moment, O God,  
Because we know that in life  
there is caring and hostility,  
warmth and chill,  
freedom and burden,  
peace and anxiety.  
And we come to this moment  
because we know you, O God, are here.  
You are wisdom and truth,  
hope and strength,  
healing and new life.  
From you flows  
all that we long for and need.  
Be with us now  
as we acknowledge N.'s past,  
affirm her present,  
and envision her new future.  
Amen.

## The Listening and Sharing

### Scripture Readings

Ezekiel 36:25–28  
Psalm 142 (VU 865)  
Matthew 11:28–30  
or text(s) suggested by the survivor

### Reflection

You might use:

- *lectio divina* with one of the texts
- a thoughtful conversation or discussion of the verses
- a sharing of some brief thoughts prepared by the presider beforehand

## Prayer of Response

We thank you, Holy One,  
for this gift of inspired scripture  
that draws us to you,  
offering peace and wisdom,  
empowerment and cleansing.  
Ease us gently now into your abundant new life.  
Amen.

## The Response: Liturgy for Wholeness

### Affirmation of faith

N. do you reaffirm your faith in God the Creator,  
who loves you and wills you no harm  
wanting only wholeness, health, and joy for you?

**Yes, I do.**

N. do you reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ  
who knew suffering and hurt,  
the power of guilt, anger, and inner wounds?

**Yes, I do.**

N. do you reaffirm your faith in the Spirit  
who cleanses us from every taint of  
self-doubt, guilt, and condemnation  
and who is ready to empower us each day?

**Yes, I do.**

### Anointing with Oil

#### **Statement of Purpose**

Since the time of Jesus Christ and before that,  
anointing with oil was a sign  
of healing, forgiveness, and royalty.  
Jesus is referred to as The Anointed One;  
he was anointed by the Spirit at baptism  
and by a woman near the time of his death.  
His disciples anointed those who were ill  
when Jesus sent them out two by two.  
The Christian church maintained this gift, and  
we now bring the ancient holy symbol to you.

#### **Blessing of the Oil**

May this oil be a source of faith and healing,  
a sacred marking of endings and beginnings,  
and a sign of the Spirit guiding you  
and remaining with you always. Amen.

*(Invite the candidate to kneel as appropriate.)*

N. I anoint you with the Creator's healing oil  
 and I mark you with the sign of Christ's cross  
 [and as the disciples did long ago,  
 I lay hands upon you in Jesus' name],  
 for in Christ's Spirit you are safe  
 from the powers of your past,  
 freed from death-dealing events  
 and from all forms of condemnation.  
 Rise up, a new person in Christ!  
*(Helps N. to stand.)*  
 Work with God to raise up all people  
 into the glory of God!

### Blessing of the symbol

N., please place your symbol of wholeness and wellbeing,  
 to which God calls you this day,  
 on Christ's Table of Love and Forgiveness  
 of Community and New Life.  
*(N. does so.)*  
 Let us pray.  
 Spirit of truth and integrity,  
 Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
 Spirit of knowledge and power,  
 bless this .... that it may be  
 a sign, symbol, and reminder for N.  
 that she belongs to you and that you love her every day.  
 Bless this .... that it may help her grow  
 from any bitterness and false values, from lies and violence,  
 and bring her strength, trust, safety, and peace.  
 May she yearn to serve you faithfully  
 in love and for love's sake.  
 Bless this .... in the name of our Creator, Christ, and Spirit. Amen.

N. wear / place this ... where you will see it daily  
 as a reminder to rejoice in who you truly are,  
 to grow in trust, and to know you are supported and cherished  
 by God and all God's faithful people.  
*(Invite the candidate to kneel.)*

### Blessing of the Survivor

And now may the love of God,  
 who created you for health and peace,  
 and the grace of Jesus Christ,  
 who restores you and all creation,  
 and the fellowship of the Spirit,  
 who fills you with holiness and love,  
 bless you and be with you  
 now and forever. Amen.

*(If appropriate and desired, the Eucharist or an agape meal may be celebrated here.)*

## Departing

### Closing Prayer

We give you thanks, Holy God,  
that in you, Creator, there is sound understanding,  
sure hope, and true community.  
We give you thanks, Holy God,  
that in Jesus Christ there is new life,  
pure light, and everlasting gentle kindness.  
We give you thanks, Holy God,  
that in your Spirit there is gracious empowerment,  
and deep, honest communion with you.

And we are today especially thankful for N.  
Show her portals and pathways  
that your health and life  
may truly be hers. Amen.

### Commissioning

N., go in peace  
to love and serve your Creator,  
to grow in wisdom and understanding,  
freedom, and power.  
For to this you are called today.  
Thanks be to God.