# Decovenanting Service

## Gathering

### Welcome

Dear friends, in the book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher writes:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to seek, and a time to lose…. (Ecclesiastes 3:1‒6*a*)

Our minister, *N.,* is leaving us to follow another call in *his/her/their* life. Today, therefore, it is time to mark the ending of *his/her/their* ministry here at *N. United Church/Pastoral Charge*. This is a time to look back, and a time to look forward; a time for joy, and a time for sadness. It is a time to give thanks and praise to God for what *N.* has given us in our time together.

### Call to Worship

Blessed be God.  
**And blessed be God’s name.**God makes everything beautiful in its time.  
**Whatever God does endures forever.**Blessed be God, all you people;  
**And all who do God’s will.**For everything there is a season; a time to go, and a time to come.  
Yet the Spirit blows where it will.  
**And for those who are led by the Spirit, they must follow.**

### Lighting of Candle

We light this candle, recognizing that Christ is in our midst.  
**May our prayers rise to you like the flame of this candle.**May our hopes dance into your presence  
**like the smoke from this flame.**

### Opening Prayer

Loving God,  
our church community is ever changing.  
Loved ones are welcomed into the community,  
and loved ones come to the end of their lives.  
People come and go in our church life.  
Today we celebrate *N.’s* time with us.Help us to treasure our memories,  
as we open to new movements  
of the Spirit amongst us. Amen.

### Hymn

VU 558 We Gather Here to Bid Farewell  
VU 567 Will You Come and Follow Me  
VU 575 I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me  
VU 606 In Christ There Is No East or West  
MV 1 Let Us Build a House (All Are Welcome)  
MV 135 Called by Earth and Sky  
MV 154 Deep in Our Hearts

## Breaking Open the Word

### Scripture

Genesis 31:44‒46, 48‒49, 50*b* Laban and Jacob make a covenant  
Psalm 30:5*b*, 11 Weeping may linger; joy comes  
Psalm 42 (*select verses*) My soul longs for you, O God  
Psalm 119:89‒96 God is faithful; the law is my delight  
Psalm 133 We are blessed when we live in unity  
Psalm 139:7‒12 (1‒18, 23‒24) On eagles’ wings  
Ecclesiastes 3:1‒8; 7:8, 10, 13‒14 For everything there is a time;  
 better the end than the beginning

### Gift of Music

“No Farewells,” Ian McDonald and Gordon Light, The Common Cup Company, [commoncup.com](https://commoncup.com/sheet-music/)  
“Singing in the Night,” Gordon Light, The Common Cup Company, [commoncup.com](https://commoncup.com/sheet-music/)  
“Bathe Her In Your Love,” Joe Wise, GIA Publications

*Consult your church musician.*

### Scripture

Matthew 11:28‒30 Come to me, all who are weary  
Mark 4:26‒34 The kingdom of God parables  
John 15 (*select verses*) I am the vine; this is my commandment  
Romans 8 (*select verses*)If God is for us, who can be against?  
Galatians 3:23‒39 There is no Jew or Greek; you belong to Christ  
Philippians 4:1‒10, 23 Rejoice in the Lord always  
Revelation 7:17 The Lamb will be their shepherd;  
 God will wipe away every tear

### Reflection

(Could be a final sermon by the minister or a guest preacher.)

## Completion of Covenant

### Statement of Purpose

When a minister comes into our church  
we covenant with one another;  
we promise to journey with one another  
caring and being cared for.  
While God’s covenant never ceases,  
our covenants with one another do.  
Today we mark the ending of the covenant  
between *N.,   
N.* United Church/Pastoral Charge,  
and *N.* Regional Council.

### Return of Ministerial Symbols

When I came among you, to serve with you in the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, or Education, Service, and Pastoral Care*…*you gifted me with some symbols that I now return to you:

**Bible (*Place Bible on the pulpit.*)**

*N.* The Bible is a symbol of the ministry  
 of the Word among us.  
 May God’s Word continue to challenge,  
 nurture, and inspire us.

**All: We will continue to place scripture at the centre of our life.**

**The Word of God lives among us. Thanks be to God.**

**Water (**Pour water into font; place pitcher nearby.**)**

*N.* The font is the symbol of our baptism,  
the place of our birth into the body of Christ.  
 May you continue to welcome new members  
 through the living waters of our faith.  
**All: We will continue to celebrate new life in baptism:  
 the font of blessing welcomes all. Thanks be to God.**

**Bread and Cup (**Place bread and cup on communion table.**)**

*N.* The table is the symbol of our communion in Christ,  
 the source of nourishment and strength.  
 May you continue to welcome new members  
 through the living waters of our faith.  
**All: We will continue to break the bread and share the cup.  
 The table invites us to taste and see that God is good.  
 Thanks be to God.**

**Towel and Basin**

*N.* The towel and basin are symbols  
 of our calling to justice and service,  
 following the example of Jesus,  
 who washed the feet of his friends.  
 May you continue in the way of Christ.  
**All: We will continue to serve others and to work for justice,  
 following in the way of Jesus, Friend and Servant of all.  
 Thanks be to God.**

### Empowering Symbols

I also have some gifts to offer you as you begin your process of discernment: (suggestions of your unique ministry; the following are merely examples.)

**Hymn Book**

*N.* During my time I was fed by singing in the choir.  
Hold this, our theology in song, in trust  
 that it may continue to nurture your spirits.  
**All: We will continue to sing and cherish our hymns.  
 Thanks be to God.**

**Photo Directory or Historic Record**

*N.* During my time I have come to love this community.  
I have seen people come and go.  
 Hold this, the people of this community of faith, in love  
 that you may continue to care for one another.  
**All: We will continue to care for one another,  
 bearing both our joys and sorrows together.  
 Thanks be to God.**

**Walking Stick**

*N.* During our time together we have sought  
to travel the way of Jesus in this community.  
**All: We will continue to follow the way of Jesus,  
 travelling as companions on the journey.**

**Map and Compass**

*N.* As you go forward into this time of discernment  
may you seek to follow the way of Jesus  
 as you are being called to in this *city/town/municipality.***All: We will continue to discern God’s call to service  
 in our community. Thanks be to God.**

**Plant**

*N.* During our time together, I watched you grow  
 and mature in your faith. Continue to grow!  
**All: We will continue to grow in our faith,  
 nurturing the community of faith.  
 Thanks be to God.**

**Duct Tape**

*N.* During our time together, there were challenging times  
when we weren’t sure what was coming next.  
 Take this duct tape as a symbol of your ability  
 to stick together and get things done.  
**All: We will continue to stick together to accomplish  
 the ministry of our community. Thanks be to God.**

**Slinky**

*N.* Finally, I want to gift you with this Slinky.  
Take it as a symbol of the joy you have as a community.  
 May it remind you to be flexible and joyful always!  
**All: We will refrain from rigidity, exercising our flexibility  
 and rooting our faith in joy! Thanks be to God.**

**Keys**

*N.* I return these keys, the symbol of my leadership among you,  
and I will pray for your discernment going forward.  
**All: We will care for our building and the heritage it  
 represents as we discern our way forward.  
 Thanks be to God.**

### Litany of Thanksgiving and Forgiveness

Chair: We are all called by God to offer our unique gifts and work.  
**All: But some are called to lead in particular ways.**Chair: We are all called by God to speak our faith.  
**All: But some are called to preach to the community  
 with prophetic words of compassion and justice.**Chair: We are all called by God to comfort those who suffer.  
**All: But some are called to share in the pain of the entire flock.**Chair: We give thanks for *N.,* who has been  
 the shepherd in our midst.  
**All: One who has led us, taught us, challenged us,  
 and shared both our suffering and our joy.***N.* I give thanks for the prayers that surround me  
as I complete my ministry among you,  
 and I ask you to forgive me for the mistakes I’ve made,  
 the dreams not realized, and the expectations not met.  
**All: Yes, we forgive you and bless you.  
 We rejoice in the ways we have been blessed  
 by your ministry among us.  
 We ask your forgiveness for mistakes made  
 and for expectations not met.***N.* I receive your gratitude and forgive your shortcomings.  
Region: Do you, *N.,* release this pastoral charge  
 from the vows and promises made at your covenanting?  
*N.* I do, God being my helper.  
Region: Do you, the members and friends of *N. United Church,*  
 release *N.* from the duties of ministry among you?  
**All: We do, God being our helper.**Chair: (*Lighting a candle from the Christ candle*)*.* We invite you to accept this candle to remember us.  
 Remember that God’s light always burns within you.  
 Go now, surrounded by our love  
 and led by God, the Christ, and the Spirit.  
**All: Amen.**

## Sending Forth

### Hymn

VU 418 Go Forth for God  
VU 422‒423 God Be with You till We Meet Again  
VU 481 Sent Forth by God’s Blessing  
VU 572 Send Me, Lord  
MV 209 Go, Make a Diff’rence  
MV 212 Sent Out in Jesus’ Name

### Commissioning and Benediction

*N.* Go now, to follow the way of Christ.  
As you have been a blessing to me, go be a blessing for others.  
**All: As you have been a blessing to us,  
 so also may you be a blessing to others.***N.* May God, the Source of Love,  
bless you in your ministry in this place.  
**All: May God, the Father, bless you in your ministry  
 in *place/retirement.****N.* May Jesus, the Love Incarnate, ever be with you and guide you.  
**All: May God, the Son, be ever with you and guide you.***N.* May the Spirit, love’s presence and comfort,  
 fill you with every good thing.  
**All: May God, the Spirit, be with you always. Amen!**

―The Reverend Teresa A. Burnett-Cole is minister at Glebe-St. James United Church in Ottawa, ON.