Sankofa: Looking Back, Moving Forward

*A service for church courts that are closing in this time of transition. Feel free to adapt this service for your circumstances or incorporate your own rituals of saying goodbye. To share your ideas, e-mail worship@united-church.ca.*

**Preparation:** *Have three candles and three speakers that represent the diversity of your presbytery, district, Conference, consistoire, or synod prepared. The service is broken up into three sections that you may wish to weave throughout a meeting (beginning, middle, and end) or do all together followed by a communion. Another option would be to do this liturgy over a shared meal with the welcome and first section before the first course, the second before the second course, and the third section before dessert.*

**Words of Welcome:**

We are here to mark an end and a beginning. We come with feelings of fear and excitement, joy and pain, anger and gratitude. As we say goodbye to [*insert name of church body*] and the courts of the church as we have known them, we trust that God will continue to call us in new directions.

As a [*insert name of church body*], we have shared worship, hard work, fellowship, and growth in the faith for the betterment of The United Church of Canada. We have given our time, our energy, and our gifts. As we transition toward regional councils and say goodbye to our current church structure, may we remain faithful to God’s call and continue to support each other as co-workers in Christ’s mission.

**Hymn Suggestions:**

“Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness/ ”Souffle, vent doux du Saint-Esprit” (VU 375/ NVU 47)

“We Have This Ministry”/ “Le minstère du Christ” (VU 510/ NVU 163)

“Demeure par ta grâce” (NVU 266)

“For the Faithful Who Have Answered” (VU 707)

“My Life Flow On” (VU 716)

“God of the Bible” (MV 28)

“Praise God for This Holy Ground” (MV 42)

“God, Help Us to Treasure” (MV 147)

**Scripture Suggestions:**

Genesis 12:1–9 (Abraham goes to new territory in faith)

Deuteronomy 32:1–9 (Farewell to Moses)

Joshua 24:1, 14–25 (Joshua’s farewell to his people)

Psalm 139:7–12 (Where can I flee from God’s presence?)

Ecclesiastes 3:1–7 (A time for everything)

Isaiah 40:1–11 (Words of hope and comfort)

Isaiah 43:1–7 (Do not be afraid)

Matthew 6:25–34 (Do not worry; God cares)

Luke 9:57–62 (Do not look back)

John 15:1–11 (The vine and the branches)

Acts 17:22–34*a* (God does not live in temples)

Romans 8 (selected verses) (Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ)

Ephesians 2:17–22 (One in Christ)

# Remembering our past

**Lighting of Candle:**

We light this candle in memory of all the saints who served with and supported [*insert name of body*] over the last [*number of years*] years for the glory of God.

**May their stories, and ours, be a part of God’s holy story.**

[*Moment of silence*]

**Sung Response:**

“Come, O Come, Let Us Praise” (MV 56, v. 1)

“Hallelujah” (Iona; VU 717/ NVU 72)

**Words of Remembrance:**

*Ask a member (perhaps a past executive, a long-time member, or someone who was part of a major event in the life of your church body) to share a brief reflection:* What was a pivotal/formational moment in the life of your [*church body*] that has shaped our ministry as a church? What are you most grateful for in the history of your [*church body*]?

**Prayer:**

Creating God,

As a united and uniting church,

we continue to live out the dreams of our forebears, and own our mixed legacy.

We give thanks that on [*date*], [*name* / *type of body*] was consecrated/commissioned to aid and support communities of faith living out the call of discipleship.

Our ministry has grown out of the generations of believers before us

who faithfully accepted the call to be the church:

to celebrate God’s presence,

to live with respect in Creation,

to seek justice and resist evil, and

to proclaim our hope in Jesus.

Bless the ministries that have captivated and inspired us to be our best [*name ministries that are important to your community*].

And forgive us for the ways that we wandered from your path and failed to be a blessing [*name examples—could include residential schools, ordination of women, forced adoptions, treatment of marginalized groups*].

Help us to live into an emerging faith while remembering our past.

Amen.

# Honouring our present

**Lighting of Candle:**

We light this candle as a testament to the ministry of this [*insert name of body*] and all who have shared their gifts for the service of Jesus.

**May our ending mark a new beginning for Jesus’ work in the world.**

[*Moment of silence*]

**Sung Response:**

“Come, O Come, Let Us Praise” (MV 56, v. 2)

“Hallelujah” (Iona; VU 717/ NVU 72)

**Words of Reflection:**

*Ask an active member to share a brief reflection:* What is a specific way that your [*church body*] has witnessed to the gospel in your current time and place? What do you hope will most be remembered about your community’s ministry?

**Prayer:**

Loving Jesus,

As a [*insert name of body*], created for the sake of your ministry, we have

exercised oversight with pastoral charges and ministry personnel,

maintained relationships with every court of the church,

managed properties, and

administered assessments.

With the support of faithful members and dedicated staff,

we have attempted to be a blessing to the ministries entrusted in our care.

Thank you for the many people who serve this body [*insert names of current staff and key leaders*] and for the continued opportunity to serve your church in this time and place.

For the sake of your mission, we release our current responsibilities as a [*name of church body*] in preparation for something new.

Accept us as we are and grant us your peace as we discern new ways to be the church. Amen.

# Dreaming our future

**Lighting of Candle:**

We light this candle as a prayer, for our community and for our church that is guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

**May our dreams be an integral part of the Spirit’s master plan.**

[*Moment of silence*]

**Sung Response:**

“Come, O Come, Let Us Praise” (MV 56, v. 3)

“Hallelujah” (Iona; VU 717/ NVU 72 )

**Words of Purpose:**

*Ask a member to share a brief reflection:* How do you hope that the legacy of your [*church body’s*] ministry will feed and support future generations? What is your hope for the church of future generations?

**Prayer:**

Guiding Spirit,

As people of the way,

we are called to be a blessing, commissioned to be the church, and challenged to live the gospel.

Today we boldly leave the paths that have brought us this far

to discover new ways of doing the work of Jesus.

We give thanks for the way behind us and the faithful who have led us this far… [*name people and ministries from the past*].

We gives thanks for the way around us and our faithful companions in ministry… [*name current people and ministries*].

We give thanks for the way in front of us and the faithful willing to clear challenging paths and seek new possibilities… [*name some trailblazers*].

May we commit ourselves to following your lead so that our work will support future generations, who, with your help, will do infinitely more than we could imagine. Amen.

**Extinguishing the Candles:**

As the light is transformed, carry it with you, as we journey toward something new.

Remember the stories of [*insert name of body*].

**It is our story.**

[*extinguish first candle*]

Honour the ministries of [*insert name of body*].

**It is our legacy.**

[*extinguish second candle*]

Pray for the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the United Church.

**It is our calling.**

[*extinguish third candle*]

**Blessing:**

At all times remember:

God is under our feet

God is over our head

God is beyond us

God is behind us

God is among us

And God will always be between us, uniting us, blessing us. Amen.

**Closing Hymn:**

“Sent Out in Jesus’ Name” (MV 212)

“Take Up His Song” (MV 213)

“God, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing” (VU 425)

“The Church of Christ in Every Age” (VU 601)

“Travel On, Travel On” (VU 647)

“For All the Saints” (VU 705)

“Dans ta parole ô Dieu” (NVU 285)

“Donnons louange et gloire” (NVU 299)