

FINISHED NOT FAILED HOLY CLOSURE



A Resource For Accompanying Congregations

*I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.
~1 Timothy 4:7*



Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America




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The Church of Christ in every age
Beset by change but Spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.
~ELW 729

This document is a compilation from "Leaving a Legacy of Mission and Ministry" (ELCA), closing documents from synods across the church, and support from a synod attorney.



Introduction & Overview of Holy Closure

Finished not Failed Life Cycle

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;

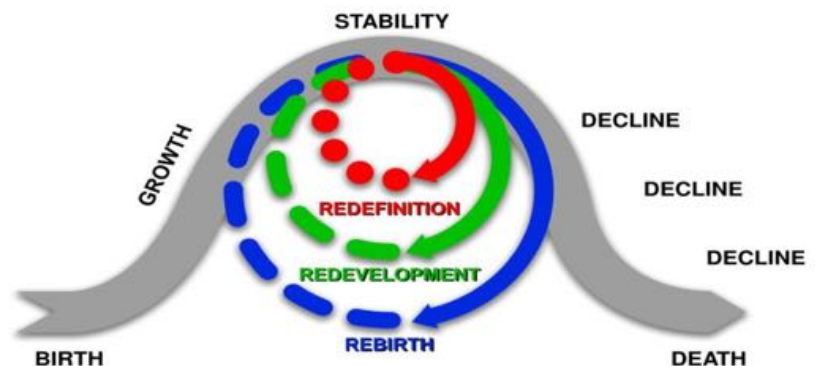
a time to mourn, and a time to dance. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4)

Those who live, care for, and work on the land in Wisconsin understand deeply the seasons and cycles named in Ecclesiastes! The rhythm of life here is intricately connected to weather and seasons and changing of landscapes. Woven into that is a reality that everything has a life cycle- a beginning, middle, and end. Congregations are no different! The communities of faith we read about in the book of Acts are no longer around today. But the seeds that were planted, the faith that was shared and passed down from generation to generation, ensured for the continuation of the proclamation of the Gospel and for the formation of new communities of faith. This cycle and rhythm continues today.

Discussion: Where is your congregation on the Life Cycle chart below? Do your members have the energy to “circle back” through redefinition, redevelopment, or rebirth and be renewed to grow to engage in sustained stable ministry?

Sometimes, sustained prayer and conversation about mission leads to the realization that a congregation doesn't have the energy for renewal and the next most faithful step is to close. Know that choosing closure is a faithful response. As Christians, we know that finishing the work God has given us to do isn't the end of the story, we are a resurrection people!

The Congregational Life Cycle



Jesus taught that a seed must die to bear much fruit (John 12:23-26). Grief is inevitable, but closing may also be an opportunity to use the congregation's resources to continue God's mission in another way or in another place.

Introduction & Overview of Holy Closure

Death and Dying

Just as individuals experiencing change and loss go through stages of grief, so do congregations. It is important to acknowledge the stages of grief as they are experienced by congregational members, lay leaders, and pastoral leaders. The classic stages of grief are denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. As with any grief, there is no set time-line, nor is there a set order for moving through these stages. Different issues will affect different people in different ways. Different people within the congregation will be at different places in the grief cycle at any given time. Acknowledge this, and respect where different people are in their grief process. A good resource for leaders is *Embracing God's Future without Forgetting the Past: A Conversation about Loss, Grief, and Nostalgia in Congregational Life* by Mike Girlinghouse.

Good communication is important at any time. In a time of crisis, change and loss, communication is critically important. Do lots of listening. Be open about the process. Involve as many voices as possible in your discernment conversations. Allow everyone to be heard.

A congregation was at a holy fork in the road. They were discerning what their next most faithful step might be. They prayerfully sent all their members out to visit and learn about other nearby congregations. When the time came to close their congregation they decided to all join the same neighboring congregation. They gifted this congregation with some of their historic items and some of their remaining financial assets but most importantly they brought their love of Jesus, leadership skills, and missional energy for service. This congregation didn't die, it just moved to a new location.



Introduction & Overview of Holy Closure

Do not underestimate the strength that comes from having companions on the journey. "Mutual conversation and consolation" among the community of believers is truly a means of God's grace. Especially during difficult times, draw on the strength and insight that comes from corporate worship, bible study, and prayer.

Do not underestimate the power and significance of material things. It is normal for people to have powerful emotional attachments to such things as pews, stained glass, cemeteries, communion ware, and even silverware and furniture. This is not simply a matter of idolatry. Everything in a church develops layers of meaning over time. Every object can accumulate layers of stories and powerful emotional resonance. Find ways to respect and honor the significance of these objects, even—and especially—as you are letting go.

Resurrection

Even in death, we have the promise of resurrection. Closing a congregation does not have to mean an end to ministry. In fact, closing may actually be a way of extending and expanding a congregation's ministry. In Holy Closure we look for resurrection through the continuation of other ministry. The strategic investment of the mission assets from your congregation can help catapult congregational, synodical, churchwide ministries and global initiatives and the important work of ministry partners forward with the gospel of Christ.

Holy Closure

This document has been created to accompany congregations who have made the decision to close. It is intended to help leaders navigate the many steps involved in the process. There is a separate document "Discerning Our Future" to accompany congregations in discerning their ministry future.

There are many steps in the Holy Closure process, and it can feel overwhelming. For closing of a congregation, leaders will steward 5 areas:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| + Formal Dissolution of a Congregation | + Records |
| + Assets and Legacy | + People |
| | + Service of Holy Closure |

Please note that congregations will be working on these five areas simultaneously. It is recommended that a team is formed to help steward the many details. The remaining sections in this document seek to be as all-encompassing as possible as a congregation stewards this final chapter. Refer to the appropriate section for details regarding each area and do not hesitate to reach out to the synod office with any questions. The congregational president or pastoral leader should be in regular communication with the Bishop or member of the synod staff as they work through the necessary steps.

Frequently Asked Questions

Below is a list of several frequently asked questions and answers to help guide discussions as congregation leaders work toward Holy Closure and communicate with the congregation.

What is Holy Closure?

Holy Closure is a multi-step faithful process that prepares congregations to be strong and courageous as they acknowledge that the most faithful thing they can do is to close their beloved church. It is natural for there to be a grieving process.

How do we know we are at the point of Holy Closure?

This involves a discernment process of prayer and thoughtful reflection and discussion. Generally, it is when the congregation no longer has the people, resources or energy to continue to fulfill its mission. Explore Holy Fork in the Road Energy Audit and Conversations as a guide for discernment. See Appendix E page 33 at the end of this document.

How long will it take to go through the grieving process? Have others already gone through this?

The grieving process is different for everyone. Be patient and understanding as everyone grieves differently. Be open with each other and pray for all those affected by this closure. There have been congregations which have closed in the synod and its members have been able to find new, welcoming church homes, while bringing with them their memories and the faith nurtured in their previous church home.

How is a decision for Holy Closure made?

Closing a congregation generally requires a 2/3 vote (or such other vote required by the congregation's constitution) at a properly called meeting of the voting members of the congregation to accept the recommendation of the Congregation Council to end the congregation's legal existence as a religious entity. The congregation may need to vote as many as three times during the process:

- A vote to start the process to dissolve and authorize the Congregational council to work through necessary steps.
- A vote to accept the purchase agreement for the sale of the property if applicable
- After the sale closes and monies are received, a vote to officially approve dissolution and the final distribution of assets.
- Your constitution or certificate of incorporation can add additional voting or meeting requirements. Please review both thoroughly.

What are the steps to dissolving the congregation?

There are many steps in the dissolution of a congregation's legal existence. Some are legal, some are financial, and some are operational. These steps must be done in accordance with the constitution of the congregation and also the laws governing Religious Corporations in the State of Wisconsin. See Section 1: Dissolution of a Congregation, for more information.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are some of the legal and financial steps?

- Determine all of the financial assets of the congregation – bank accounts, investments, money held by committees, memorial funds, special funds, etc.
- Transfer or sale of the church property (including parsonage).
- Transfer or sale of furnishings and other property owned by the congregation. Payment of all debts.
- Have a simple audit done, perhaps by a neighboring congregation. This ensures that everything is above board.
- Distributing financial assets i.e. bank accounts, trusts, endowments and other financial assets in accordance with constitutional and legal requirements.
- We recommend contacting Cynthia Halverson, Director of Lutheran Planned Giving of Wisconsin, Region Gift Planner to help you with distribution of assets and a Legacy Directive Plan.
cynthia.halverson@elca.org, 773-380-2572
- Filing of legal documents with government authorities to dissolve the corporation status of the congregation.
- We recommend hiring an attorney to file the closing paperwork and to guide you through questions about property. If you have a member who is an attorney they might be willing to donate their time. Otherwise we recommend Cindy Hangartner. She is the attorney who helped several congregations in our synod and is a member of Peace Lutheran in Pigeon Falls. Depending on the complexity of the situation legal fees will begin at approximately \$3,500. Here is her contact information. CHangartner@CrivelloCarlson.com, 715-598-0733.

How much will it cost?

The final costs will depend in part upon the process selected by the congregation. There are fees associated with archiving of documents, legal fees, real estate fees, and the continuation of the care of the property including insurance. Congregations are obligated by law to pay all of their debts before any proceeds from the sale of church assets can be distributed.

Who will attend to these tasks?

The Congregational Council will address each of these steps with the help and guidance of the Synod along with legal and financial professionals. It is helpful if all the members of the congregation help in the process. Committees or teams may be formed to address specific tasks. Getting involved with the process and tasks can facilitate the grief process.

When is the last regular Sunday service?

The Congregational Council will determine when the last Sunday service would be. It is appropriate to hold a grand celebration of the congregation. The date and nature of this celebration is determined by the Congregational Council.

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens to all the assets in the buildings? Who will be responsible for making the decisions?

All the assets including tables, chairs, pianos, appliances, furnishings etc. are considered assets of the congregation and would be disposed of either by sale or by donation to other religious or non-profit organizations. The provisions of the sale and timing for this will be determined by the Congregation's Council with guidance from both the Synod and legal counsel. The congregation has to vote on the final sale of the building.

What happens if the building is not sold?

If the building is not sold, the congregation may vote to donate the property to a religious, membership, educational, municipal or other not-for-profit organization for no or minimal consideration. Any assets remaining in the name of the congregation when it dissolves revert to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin.

When is the congregation actually closed?

The congregation will finally close when all the legal and financial requirements as required by law are complete which generally takes a number of months. The Congregation's Council, congregation and care of the property continue until this is done.

Who can vote in these matters?

Check with your own constitution regarding who can vote and rules pertaining to congregational meetings – quorums, notification required, etc.



The faithful members of St. Luke discerned together that their ministry together in that place was drawing to a close. As part of their legacy, eight churches in Wisconsin and South Dakota received needed furniture, worship furnishings, kitchen supplies, and signage to support their ministries. In addition, St. Luke donated items of historical record to the German-Russian society to ensure the preservation and celebration of history and story. The story of St. Luke continues through the ministry of other congregations.

Section 1: Overview of the Dissolution Process

- Schedule a consultation of the congregation with the Bishop or member of the synod staff to develop a plan for the dissolution process, and include a recommendation to dissolve the church corporation as required by the state corporation statute. (Consult with legal counsel to ensure all necessary legal provisions are followed in relation to plan of dissolution of church corporation. In order to properly convey any property owned by the congregation during the closing process, the congregation's nonprofit corporation must be "active and in good standing" with the WI Secretary of State. This can be determined by checking the [Secretary of State's website](#).)
- Convene a special meeting of the congregation, properly called in accordance with the requirements for such a special meeting, as specified in the congregation constitution and in the state corporation statute.
- Adopt a resolution to dissolve, which shall be approved by the required majority of voting members present at the special meeting of the congregation called for that purpose (See sample motion on page 9). This first resolution can simply be a vote to close with authorization for the council to take responsibility for leading the closure process. Note: A congregation will likely need to call a second congregational meeting at a later date to address all required steps in the dissolution process. The council should call this meeting once a plan has been formed for the disposition of assets and legacy directives determined.
- When the congregation has voted to close, the congregation council should file an Intent to Dissolve form with the Wisconsin Secretary of State. Note: this is a two- step process and there is a separate process if two congregations plan to legally merge or consolidate.
- Consider any additional matters related to special circumstances in the dissolution of a particular congregation, such as a congregation that was part of a multi-point parish. Ensure that the closing congregation is removed from any joint accounts, etc. If in a parish arrangement, please note any stipulations regarding notification as to disaffiliate from the parish.
- The council should create a plan for the orderly disposition of all congregational assets. See Section 3 for information about property and other assets.
- Carry out promptly, before dissolution of the congregation, payment of all debts and liabilities of the congregation.

Section 1: Overview of the Dissolution Process

- Convene another special meeting of the congregation to address required steps in the dissolution process. This meeting should include approval of sale or disposal of property and approval of legacy directives for remaining assets. See Section 3 for details on disposal of assets. A resolution to dissolve shall include:
 1. The stated effective date of the dissolution; Provision for payment of liabilities;
 2. Authorization to the appropriate officers to carry out the proper transfer of title or disposition of the real and personal property; and
 3. Provision for dissolution of the corporation.

Note: The stated date of dissolution need not be the date of the congregational vote. A date in the future may be named as the date of dissolution in order to finalize transfer of title, disbursement of assets, etc.

- Carry out promptly before dissolution of the congregation,
 1. The transfer of title to real estate to the appropriate successor in title;
 2. Transfer of title or ownership of furnishing or other personal property of the congregation;
 3. Transfer of all bank accounts, trusts, endowments, or other assets;
 4. Change mailing address and give neighbors and police information on a contact name if building is still owned but not occupied.
- Establish a plan/timeline, effective upon dissolution, for the transfer of members to other congregations. See Section 4 for more information.
- Ensure that the synod office officially notifies the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America of the date of dissolution of the congregation.
- When the congregation has hosted the final worship service and all assets have been distributed, the congregation council should file [Articles of Dissolution](#) with the Wisconsin Secretary of State and send a letter to the IRS closing the congregation's EIN Number.

Sample Resolution

Sample Resolution for Initial Vote of Closure

_____ Lutheran Church (insert city and state) Congregation meeting date: _____

Be it resolved that: We the members of _____ Lutheran Church declare our intention to discontinue ministry and dissolve the congregation in (insert city and state).

After extensive and prayerful deliberation, we are saddened to cast our votes for dissolution and discontinuance. We give thanks to God for the faithful ministry that has been carried out in this place. We pray that God will continue to renew the church here and always.

In order to responsibly carry out this decision, we direct our Congregation Council to work in partnership with the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and its bishop to:

- Identify a date for a closing worship service and celebration of ministry
- Provide pastoral care and leadership for our members during this time of special need and transition to new venues for ministry and membership
- Oversee the affairs of the congregation and the orderly disposition of property and assets.

Sample Resolution for final vote of Dissolution

_____ Lutheran Church (insert city and state) Congregation meeting date: _____

Be it resolved that: We the members of _____ Lutheran Church declare our intention to dissolve the congregation in (insert city and state). The final date of dissolution will be (date).

We direct the congregation council to oversee the disposition of assets in accordance with the legacy directives approved by the congregation. The title to any undisposed property assets passes to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin pursuant to the congregation's constitution.

Attested: Congregation Council President Congregation Secretary

Date:

Section 2: Congregational Records

Note: This summary outlining the final disposition of congregational records was by the ELCA Archivist for Region 5, (contact information on next page).

Preserving and properly archiving the congregational records is an important step in the HolyClosure process. Congregational records help preserve the history and tell the story of ministry of the church in this area. In addition, individuals may seek baptismal records for transfer and documentation. The Archivist will suggest what records to save, how to prepare them for retention and where they should be deposited at the time of closure.

What records should be saved?

- Parish registers
- Articles of Incorporation and Constitutions
- Annual meeting records
- Church council minutes
- Records of decision to close
- Committee minutes
- Property related records
- Sampling of newsletters
- Sampling of service bulletins
- All insurance policies
- Sample shots of website
- Photos, films, tapes
- Anniversary histories
- Church directories
- Annual audits



Note: This list is not exhaustive but is intended as a guide to the most critical records needed. Please consult the Region 5 Archivist for additional records possibly needed for retention.

Where should the records go?

The congregation is the sole owner of its records and is responsible for their disposition at the time of Holy Closure. Even so, the synod staff and the Region 5 Archivist are prepared to advise congregations on this important issue. When the church is part of a parish alignment at the time of closure or joins a neighboring congregation through merger, the records of the closing church should be deposited with the existing congregation. It is important to notify the synod and the ELCA Region 5 Archives of this so that the location of the records is documented for possible future access.

Section 2: Congregational Records

In the event of a closure with no existing relationship with parish partners, the records should be deposited in the ELCA Region 5 Archives after consultation with synod staff and the ELCA Region 5 Archivist. Arrangements for physical delivery of the records to the synod office for later transfer to the ELCA Region 5 Archives or direct delivery of the records to the Archives need to be discussed with synod staff and the Archivist. Shipping of records to the synod office or the ELCA Region 5 Archives may be required in some cases, but is not the preferred method of transfer, given the importance of the records and the possibility of loss with shipping services.

Additional considerations:

- It is important to create hard copies of valuable records that only exist in digital form. Ideally, this is done prior to the material coming to the ELCA Region 5 Archives.
- It is helpful to allocate a portion of the congregation's remaining assets to the ELCA Region 5 Archives for the costs of processing, conserving, organizing and making available the church's records going forward. A suggested donation is \$100 per "bankers box" of documents to be archived. The amount of the support will be discussed prior to the transfer of records to the ELCA Region 5 Archives.
- Members of the closing congregation should be informed in advance of their records disposition location and their right to access those records going forward as needed.

For questions about records care at the time of Holy Closure please contact:

ELCA Region 5 Archivist

Sue Dodd ELCA Region 5 Archives
Wartburg Theological Seminary 333 Wartburg Place
Dubuque, IA 52003-5004
(563) 589-0320
E-mail: Region5archives@wartburgseminary.edu



Section 3: Assets and Legacy

*Note: Decisions about the disposition of assets are part of the Dissolution of a Congregation process outlined in section 1. The congregation must approve sale or donation in accordance with constitution provision *C5.03.i., the sale or donation of the congregation's assets.*

Overview

The care and disposition of congregational assets should be attended to with great care and intention. How resources are shared in support of other ministry is part of a congregation's legacy and honors the forebearers of the faith that stewarded the congregational resources throughout its ministry. Congregations should spend time determining legacy directives based on values and priorities. In addition, there are specific legal parameters that must be attended to.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has strict guidelines for the disposing of non-profit assets. According to the IRS: *Assets of a [non-profit] organization must be permanently dedicated to an exempt purpose. This means that should an organization dissolve, its assets must be distributed for an exempt purpose described in this chapter or to the federal government or to a state or local government for a public purpose. If the assets could be distributed to members or private individuals or for any other purpose, the organizational test is not met. (IRS section 501 (c) (3), chapter 3).*

In other words, once something is given to a church, it belongs solely to the church. If a congregation closes, where the items go is to be determined in accordance with IRS requirements, state law, and the Constitutions, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA. The congregation cannot open the door and allow a free-for-all. Nor can an individual come back and say, "I bought that for the church, so I want it back." Absent any action, any undisposed property passes to the synod.

Another important aspect of the non-profit tax code is also found in Section 501 (c)(3) in the "Dissolution" clause. The council must ensure that property having any significant market value must be sold (at a reasonable price) or donated to another 501(c)(3) tax- exempt organization or a governmental entity (i.e., no property of significant market value may be given to a member of the congregation or other person).

What are you willing to do to help the next generation come to know and love Jesus?

Section 3: Assets and Legacy

Assets

As part of the resolution to dissolve (Section 1), the congregation should authorize the appropriate officers to carry out the proper transfer of title or disposition of the real and personal property. Real and personal property includes, but may not be limited to:

- Real property, including the church building, any surface estate (including the cemetery), and any mineral estates.
- Personal property, including:
 1. Building furnishings (e.g., altar, pews, organ, piano, etc.)
 2. Hymnals, books, etc.
 3. Items of sentimental value, but “insignificant market value” to members of the congregation (e.g., items that a member has donated to the congregation)
 4. Cash (including funds deposited in bank accounts, certificates of deposit, bonds, and endowments funds)
 5. Cooperative dividends

Items of insignificant market value may be given to members of the congregation or community. Building furnishings can be donated to another congregation or a non-profit or government agency; this can be a meaningful part of a congregation’s legacy. Both real and personal property may be put up for sale, with any proceeds being distributed according to the IRS guidelines named above.

Property

Determining the future of the building can be one of the hardest areas of Holy Closure and is another part of a congregation’s legacy. Areas of consideration include:

- Is there a non-profit or critical ministry in your community that is in need of a building?
- Will the building and property be sold or transferred?
- Is insurance coverage (fire, windstorm, theft, vandalism) to be maintained, and by whom?
- Is the building to remain standing? If so, how will it be maintained?
- Is the building to be destroyed or moved by a specific date?
- If the building is to be destroyed or moved, are there funds set aside for this purpose?
- If the congregation does not own the property, what is the plan for the building? Upkeep? Insurance?

Cemetery

It is essential to make arrangements, where appropriate, for the care and upkeep of the cemetery, including determination of clear title of land involved, completion of any corporate details, selection of directors, and disposition of any excess land. If there is a cemetery, the cemetery board must be formed and tasked with keeping the property in good order.

Section 3: Assets and Legacy

A separate cemetery association should be separately incorporated as a 501(c)3 organization. Often times, congregations will designate a portion of their legacy to the cemetery association for on-going care.

Legacy Directives

As noted in the introduction, Holy Closure is not the end of a congregation's story. How a congregation chooses to distribute assets provides for future mission and ministry, as well as a legacy in their own community. Disposition of assets is determined through a congregational vote during the Dissolution of a Congregation process. A congregation may determine that part of its legacy is to give either real or personal property to another 501c3 organization as part of their legacy. When determining a congregation's legacy, consider the following:

- Could the congregation's resources be used to plant a new congregation, or to support mission and evangelism in other ways?
- Could the church building and grounds be used in new ways to serve the local community? (For example, as a senior center, a school, a playground, a worship center for another faith community...)
- Consider the congregation's commitments and energies in the past. This might give a clue as to how existing resources could be invested in the mission of the wider church. (For example, a scholarship fund, or support for a specific ministry [outdoor ministry, campus ministry, Lutheran Charities, etc.]...)
- Can congregational furnishings and other property be sold, gifted, or re- purposed in ways so that ministry can continue?
- Identify objects and documents that have real historical value. Take steps to preserve and archive these so that others can learn from them.
- Find ways to tell, share, celebrate and preserve the congregation's story. This is also a legacy for the wider church.

Contact Cynthia Halverson, Director of Lutheran Planned Giving of Wisconsin, Region Gift Planner to help you with distribution of assets and a Legacy Directive Plan.

cynthia.halverson@elca.org, 773-380-2572

For cash assets, the synod recommends the following:

- \$2000 to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, designated for the Region 5 Archives, for care of congregational records
- 50% of remaining assets for care of cemetery, ministries important to the congregation, and/or local community agencies or ministries. This could include the local Lutheran Campus Ministry, Bible Camp ministry, (Luther Park, Luther Point, Amnicon, or Wapoggasset), World Hunger or another agency
- 10% of remaining assets as a final mission support gift to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and a special gift to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Endowment Fund
- 40% of remaining assets designated for new mission and ministry in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

Section 4: People

Members of the Congregation

Have an open discussion about where members would like to worship in the future. They may choose to all go to another congregation together, but ultimately, each member may join the congregation of their choice. It is the hope and prayer that members will remain active, faithful and supportive until the congregation closes. When accompanying members through the process of finding a new community of faith, it is important to communicate:

- It is important that members keep their membership with the congregation until the dissolution is final in order to fulfill obligations, even though they may begin worshipping at another church.
- Until Holy Closure is complete, the hope is that members will continue to support the congregation financially, as there are still financial obligations to be met.

Called or Contracted Leaders

The council and pastoral leader should be in conversation to determine date for end of call or contract. It is the responsibility of the council to fulfill all financial obligations toward their leader. The council should also communicate with Portico regarding the end of call and member sponsorship. The pastor or contracted leader should fill out a parochial report for the year of closure.

If a congregation is part of a parish agreement, that agreement ends when the congregation leaves the parish as it closes. Remaining congregations would need to form a new parish agreement. Per *C20.06. in the model constitution, a pastor or deacon's call ends if a parish agreement is terminated and the other congregation(s) would need to call the pastor or deacon again, going through a new call process.



Section 5: Service of Holy Closure

In the multi-step process of closing, the congregation will experience a variety of emotions of varying degrees: grief and nostalgia, anxiety and hopefulness about the future. Some of the members may feel relieved; some may worry that by closing, the congregation and its witness will be forgotten. A final gathering time and service can be an important way to acknowledge your congregation's history and witness in the community; it can give voice to the pain of loss that many are feeling about closing; it can be a lasting testimony to the community. Gathering with members, friends, the community at large, and other congregations who may be joining in ministry is a public sign that God's mission continues and extends beyond our temporary buildings.

Below are some suggested steps the congregation may want to consider as plans are made for the final gathering and service. The congregation should be in conversation with the Bishop or member of the synod staff to set the date for the Holy Closure Service. Typically, the Bishop or one of their staff will be present and lead portions of the service. Included in this resource is both the Service on Leave-Taking as well as a sample order of worship.

Steps to consider when planning the final service:

- Have a meal. For centuries, when Christians gather to mark a life-changing occasion, food is shared. Think what weddings and funerals would be without the meal to share in. Even baptisms and confirmations have their traditional cake or luncheons.
- Invite current and former members.
- Invite the community. This service is their chance to say farewell and Godspeed to the congregation and its witness in the community.
- Invite the recipients of the church's assets. This can be a public way to show continuity of God's work between the congregation and the recipients of their abundance. Share this information during the service.
- Invite other congregations. Especially invite a congregation if a merging of congregations is being done, or a congregation that has been identified as the primary congregation the members will be joining. This can be a powerful testament to the mutual ministry shared in Christ.
- Invite former pastors and/or deacons to attend or participate in the service. A former pastor could be invited to preach or share briefly about their time of ministry with this congregation.

Appendix A: Service of Leave-Taking

The following is from the Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Service of Leave-Taking. These elements should be set within the liturgy. Suggestions for hymns and scripture are included, but the congregation is invited to select songs that are particularly meaningful and select the texts in conversation with the leader who is preaching.

GATHERING

Address

Following the prayer of the day the presiding minister introduces the purpose of the service in these or similar words.

Today we gather [for the last time] in this place as the people of [name of congregation]. We give thanks for the ministry that has happened in this building/congregation, and for the people who have been fed and nurtured in the Christian faith here. Even as we mark the end of an era in one place, we acknowledge how we all are participants in God's mission that continues beyond this day and these walls.

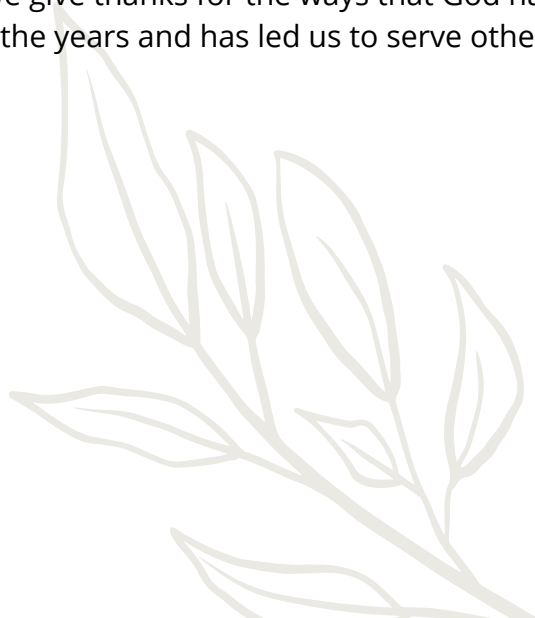
Former pastors and other leaders of the congregation or its related institutions may offer brief remarks or greetings at this time.

WORD

Thanksgiving for the Means of Grace

Following the sermon and the hymn of the day, the presiding minister addresses the congregation in these or similar words.

At the dedication of a church building, it is customary to ask God's blessing on the places of the word and sacraments. Today we return to these symbols of God's grace in our lives. Because proclaiming the word and celebrating the sacraments are the heart of a congregation's ministry, we give thanks for the ways that God has nurtured this congregation throughout the years and has led us to serve others in Christ's name.



Appendix A: Service of Leave-Taking

The presiding minister may go to each of the three primary areas where the means of grace are offered in worship: the places of the word, of baptism, and of the sacramental meal. When the space around each of these centers is large enough to accommodate all worshipers who are present, they may be invited to gather in each of those respective places.

At the place of the word

Let us pray.

O God, your mighty word at the dawn of creation breathed life into the earth and all of its inhabitants. By the gift of your incarnate Word in Jesus, you brought good news of life and salvation to all humankind. Through your word proclaimed in worship here, this congregation has been challenged and healed. Let your voice, which has sounded in this place, echo in our lives as we proclaim your message of peace into the places you will send us; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

At the place of baptism

O God, through the flood in the time of Noah, and through the waters of the Red Sea, you saved your people of old. Through the waters of baptism in this place, your people have been born to new life and have been commissioned for service in Christ's name. May all the baptized continue to give witness to your saving grace throughout the world; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

At the place of the meal

O God, through manna on a wilderness journey and through loaves of bread multiplied on a hillside, you fed people who needed sustenance for their bodies and souls. May all who have been nourished here with the body and blood of Christ give themselves away as food for the hungry. May all who have feasted here welcome others to the banquet of salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Appendix A: Service of Leave-Taking

Prayers of Intercession

Prayers of intercession are prepared locally for the occasion and include petitions for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation. One or more of the following petitions may be included in the prayers of intercession.

For the one holy, catholic and apostolic church in all times and places, of which this congregation and its building have been a part, we give our thanks and praise.

For the men and women who founded this congregation, who made personal sacrifices in order for it to grow and flourish, and who used their talents and skills in building up a community of faith, we give our thanks and praise.

For this congregation's ministries throughout its life, its gatherings for praise and prayer, its faithful use of the means of grace, and its study of the Scriptures, we give our thanks and praise.

For the work of mission this congregation has supported
[here specific names of global partners and ministries may be mentioned], for our local partners of ministry
[here names of area ecumenical organizations and local mission efforts may be mentioned], and for all the lives that have been affected by God's work through us.

For this building that has sheltered [name of congregation] for [number of] years, that the memory of this place will continue to inspire devotion to the God who makes all things possible.

For all who hold special attachments to this congregation and to this building; for those who have been baptized, nurtured in faith, confirmed, or married in this place; that the Holy Spirit's gifts continue to sustain them even as this congregation's outward expression comes to a conclusion.

For the members of this congregation, who will continue gathering as a people of God in other communities of faith, that today will mark not only the end of an era but also the beginning of new opportunities for worship and service.

Appendix A: Service of Leave-Taking

For a congregation that is merging

For [name/s of other congregation/s],
with which members of [name of congregation] are joining, that various gifts for ministry
may be offered and shared, and that renewal in life and mission may flourish.

For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the [name of synod], its present and
past bishops, staff, and other leaders who have helped this congregation throughout the
years, especially as they have led us to be faithful in our proclamation of the gospel.

For all who have been a part of the ministry of this congregation throughout its life,
those who have remained constant in the face of challenges,
those who have moved away,
and all who have died and now rest in you, we give you thanks, rejoicing that we are joined
together in one eternal communion.

MEAL

Prayer After Communion

Gracious God, at your table you strengthen us for service wherever you will send us.
As we leave this place that has been a home for worship and mission, help us to gather
in other settings that will provide further opportunities for our life and ministry.
Welcome us forever into your embrace, until that day when all your people throughout
the world worship together around the throne of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

Congregational Records and Assets

*When a congregation is closing, a representative of the closing congregation speaks the following
or similar words while handing over official congregational records.*

In remembrance and with thanksgiving, we hand over the documented history and
official records that symbolize the joys and sorrows of the people of God in this place.
Receive and preserve them so that the ministry of this congregation may be remembered.

Information about the transfer of congregational assets may be conveyed at this time.

Appendix A: Service of Leave-Taking

Declaration on Leave-Taking

The presiding minister addresses the assembly. When present, a synod bishop or another synod representative may offer the declaration.

With thanks to God for the work accomplished in this place,
I declare this congregation [name of congregation] to be closed in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
May the witness of the people
who have ministered in the name of Jesus Christ through [name of congregation]
be undiminished and continue as they leave this place.
Amen.

Blessing

The presiding minister proclaims God's blessing in these or similar words. You are a chosen
race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the
mighty acts of him
who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Almighty God,
Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.
Amen.

Dismissal

The assisting minister sends the assembly into mission.

Let us go forth in peace,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Procession

*A hymn, psalm or instrumental music may accompany the assembly as it processes out of the
worship space.*



Appendix A: Service of Leave-Taking

Notes on the Service

Ordinarily the setting for this service is in a building that a congregation is vacating. Whenever an alternative location needs to be arranged (because of serious damage to a structure, for example) this service may be adapted and altered as necessary. A pastor of the congregation may serve as the presiding minister for this occasion. The synod bishop or another synod representative, if present, may preside at the service or at the sending.

If the congregation is closing, one or more volumes of congregational records may be brought by the secretary, the president, the pastor, or another congregational representative and handed to a leader of another congregation with which the congregation is being merged, or to a person having oversight of regional church archives. If the congregation is selling property or handing over assets to another congregation, a synod, or other organizations, information about that transfer may be conveyed at this time. Representatives of organizations receiving various assets may come forward to have them presented at this time (for example, the symbolic handing over of keys to a building or the presentation of an official document or a bank check).

If it is desired, some worship appointments that can easily be carried in procession at the conclusion of the service, such as a cross, candles, a Bible or lectionary book, communion vessels, banners and other items, may lead the congregation as they take leave of the building. If the congregation is closing and is giving all of its property to other entities, including worship appointments, these items may be carried in procession by people who are assuming custody of them, such as representatives of another congregation, a regional church archives center, or an appropriate museum.

Instructions about how the items are to be handled and where they are to be placed at the conclusion of the procession should be provided to participants ahead of time. Information about where the items are going should also be conveyed to the assembly.

Propers

The propers for the Sunday on which the service of leave-taking occurs are normally used. When the service occurs at a time apart from the primary service/s of the congregation, or on a Sunday for which the color is green, propers may be selected from those listed here.

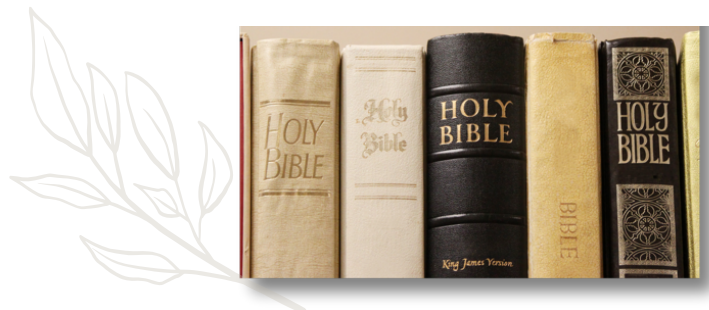
Appendix A: Service of Leave-Taking

Prayer of the Day

O God, you have promised through your Son to be with your church forever. We give you thanks for those who founded this community of believers and for the signs of your presence in this congregation throughout its life. As this congregation [name] concludes its time together [in this place], grant that we may ever follow in the way, the truth, and the life, of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Readings and Psalms

2 Samuel 7:18-29	The house of Israel
Isaiah 43:1-7	The Lord is with Israel
Isaiah 66:1-2	Heaven is the throne and earth is the footstool of God
Jeremiah 29:1-7	Israel plants gardens in Babylon
Psalms 46	The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge
Psalms 90:12-17	So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart
Psalms 103:1-8, 22	The Lord is merciful the gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love
Psalms 122	I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord."
Psalms 136:1-4, 23-26	God's mercy endures forever
Acts 17:22-31	God does not live in human shrines
Ephesians 2:11-22	No longer strangers and aliens, but members of God's household
1 Peter 2:4-10	A living stone, chosen and precious
Revelation 21:1-4, 22-27	The temple is the Lamb
Matthew 6:25-34	Do not worry about tomorrow
Matthew 16:13-20	On this rock I will build my church
Mark 10:23-31	How hard it is for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom
Luke 9:57-62	Jesus says, "Follow me"
John 15:1-11	Christ the vine



Appendix A: Service of Leave-Taking

Hymns from the ELW-Evangelical Lutheran Worship Book

- 308 O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright!
- 429 In Our Day of Thanksgiving
- 441 Oh, Happy Day When We Shall Stand
- 503-505 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
- 524 What Is This Place
- 526 God Is Here!
- 579 Lord, You Give the Great Commission
- 596, 597 My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less
- 627 O Day Full of Grace
- 632 O God, Our Help in Ages Past
- 633 We've Come This Far by Faith
- 639 When We Are Living
- 645 Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation
- 647 Glorious Things of You Are Spoken
- 652 Built on a Rock
- 654 The Church's One Foundation
- 656 Blest Be the Tie That Binds
- 729 The Church of Christ, in Every Age
- 839, 840 Now Thank We All Our God
- 858,859 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty



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Appendix B: Sample Order of Worship

A congregation may choose any setting of the liturgy from their usual hymnal. The presiding minister should receive a leader version of the bulletin, which would include the leader parts from the Service of Leave-taking. It is often helpful to have the full liturgy included in the leader bulletin, which can be found at SundaysandSeasons.com. Alternatively, the presiding minister may lead the liturgy from the hymnal. The congregation can select the texts in conversation with the preaching minister.

Order of Service – ELW Setting 4 Prelude, Welcome, and Announcements GATHERING

Confession and Forgiveness..... page 94

Gathering Song..... Hymn 504

Greeting..... page 147

Kyrie..... page 147

Hymn of Praise

“Glory to God in the Highest” – page 148

“This is the Feast” – page 149

Prayer of the Day

O God, you have promised through your Son to be with your church forever. We give you thanks for those who founded this community of believers and for the signs of your presence in this congregation throughout its life. As _____ Lutheran Church concludes its time together, grant that we may ever follow in the way, the truth, and the life, of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Closing Introduction

Siblings in Christ, today we gather for the last time in this place as the people of _____ Lutheran Church. We give thanks for the ministry that has happened in this building/congregation, and for the people who have been fed and nurtured in the Christian faith here. Even as we mark the end of an era in one place, we acknowledge how we all are participants in God’s mission that continues beyond this day and these walls.

Remarks from former leaders and others



Appendix B: Sample Order of Worship

WORD

Readings and Psalm

Gospel Acclamation..... page 151

Gospel Reading..... Matthew 6:24-35

Sermon.....

Hymn of the Day..... Hymn 654

Creed..... pages 104-105

Thanksgiving for the Means of Grace

At the dedication of a church building, it is customary to ask God's blessing on the places of the word and sacraments. Today we return to these symbols of God's grace in our lives.

Because proclaiming the word and celebrating the sacraments are the heart of a congregation's ministry, we give thanks for the ways that God has nurtured this congregation throughout the years and has led us to serve others in Christ's name.

At the place of the word

Let us pray.

O God, your mighty word at the dawn of creation breathed life into the earth and all of its inhabitants. By the gift of your incarnate Word in Jesus, you brought good news of life and salvation to all humankind. Through your word proclaimed in worship here, this congregation has been challenged and healed. Let your voice, which has sounded in this place, echo in our lives as we proclaim your message of peace into the places you will send us; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

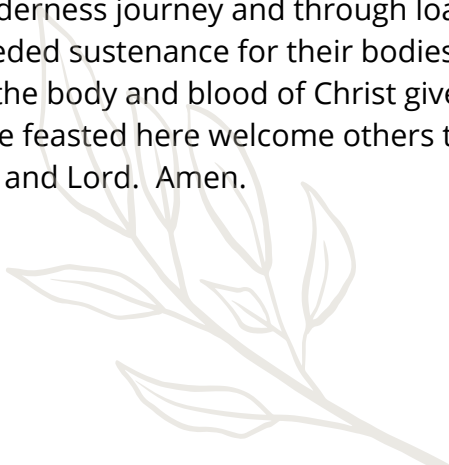
At the place of baptism

O God, through the flood in the time of Noah, and through the waters of the Red Sea, you saved your people of old. Through the waters of baptism in this place, your people have been born to new life and have been commissioned for service in Christ's name.

May all the baptized continue to give witness to your saving grace throughout the world; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

At the place of the meal

O God, through manna on a wilderness journey and through loaves of bread multiplied on a hillside, you fed people who needed sustenance for their bodies and souls. May all who have been nourished here with the body and blood of Christ give themselves away as food for the hungry. May all who have feasted here welcome others to the banquet of salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.



Appendix B: Sample Order of Worship

Prayers of Intercession

Set free from captivity to sin and death, we pray to the God of resurrection for the church, people in need, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

Holy One who acts righteously, equip your church as witnesses of your goodness to go and tell others of your abundant love, that they may believe that Jesus is our salvation and life. God, in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**

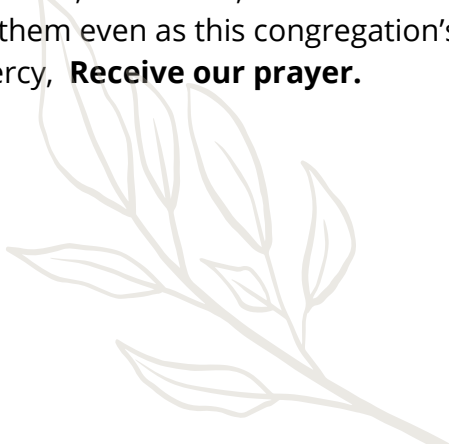
God of all creation, in this season of new life, we pray for all who tend to the soil, animals, and all creation. We pray for all whose livelihood is connected to the cycles of the earth and we give thanks for their gifts of feeding and caring for the world. We pray for those who are in danger from storms or floods. Guide all of us in our stewardship and care for all creation. Lord in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**

For the one holy, catholic and apostolic church in all times and places, of which this congregation and its building have been a part, we give our thanks and praise. For those who founded this congregation, who made personal sacrifices in order for it to grow and flourish, and who used their talents and skills in building up a community of faith, we give our thanks and praise. Lord in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**

For this congregation's ministries throughout its life, its gatherings for praise and prayer, its faithful use of the means of grace, and its study of the Scriptures, we give our thanks and praise. Lord in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**

For the work of mission this congregation has supported, for our local partners in ministry and for all the lives that have been affected by God's work through us. For this building that has sheltered _____ Lutheran Church for [number of] years, that the memory of this place will continue to inspire devotion to the God who makes all things possible. Lord in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**

For all who hold special attachments to this congregation and to this building; for those who have been baptized, nurtured in faith, confirmed, or married in this place; that the Holy Spirit's gifts continue to sustain them even as this congregation's outward expression comes to a conclusion. Lord in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**



Appendix B: Sample Order of Worship

For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, its present and past bishops, staff, and other leaders who have helped this congregation throughout the years, especially as they have led us to be faithful in our proclamation of the gospel. Lord in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**

For all who have been a part of the ministry of this congregation throughout its life, those who have remained constant in the face of challenges, those who have moved away, and all who have died and now rest in you, we give you thanks, rejoicing that we are joined together in one eternal communion. Lord in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**

Compassionate God, uphold your children who cry out to you (especially). Wherever people are overcome by the fear of death, breathe into them your life and peace. God, in your mercy, **Receive our prayer.**

In your mercy, O God, respond to these prayers, and renew us by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Savior.
Amen.

Peace

MEAL

Holy Communion Liturgy..... page 152-154

Distribution

Hymn after Communion..... Hymn 207

Prayer after Communion

Gracious God, at your table you strengthen us for service wherever you will send us. As we leave this place that has been a home for worship and mission, help us to gather in other settings that will provide further opportunities for our life and ministry. Welcome us forever into your embrace, until that day when all your people throughout the world worship together around the throne of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.



Appendix B: Sample Order of Worship

SENDING

Sending Congregational records and assets

In remembrance and with thanksgiving, we hand over the documented history and official records that symbolize the joys and sorrows of the people of God in this place. Receive and preserve them so that the ministry of this congregation may be remembered.

Closing of the congregation

With thanks to God for the work accomplished in this place, I declare this congregation [name of congregation] to be closed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. May the witness of the people who have ministered in the name of Jesus Christ through _____ Lutheran Church be undiminished and continue as they leave this place.
Amen.

Sending Song..... Hymn 656

Blessing and Dismissal

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Almighty God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.
Amen.

Dismissal

With gratitude for the ministry lived here,
Let us go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God!

Postlude



Appendix C: Relevant Portion of ELCA's Model Constitution

The following portions of the Model Constitution for Congregations deal with voting and matters in relation to closing or disposing of property. Please check your own constitution as it may be slightly different than the model.

Chapter 5. POWERS OF THE CONGREGATION

- **C5.01.** The powers of this congregation are those necessary to fulfill its purpose.
- **C5.02.** The powers of this congregation are vested in the Congregation Meeting called and conducted as provided in this constitution and bylaws.
- **C5.03.** Only such authority as is delegated to the Congregation Council or other organizational units in this congregation's governing documents is recognized. All remaining authority is retained by the congregation. The congregation is authorized to:
 - h. hold title to and use its property for any and all activities consistent with its purpose;
 - i. sell, mortgage, lease, transfer, or otherwise dispose of its property by any lawful means;

Chapter 7. PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

- **C7.01.** If this congregation ceases to exist, title to undisposed property shall pass to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- **C7.02.** If this congregation is removed from membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America according to its procedure for discipline or pursuant to 9.23. of the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, title to property shall continue to reside in this congregation.
- **C7.03.** If the voting members of this congregation present at a legally called and conducted special meeting of this congregation vote to transfer to another Lutheran church body, title to property shall continue to reside in this congregation, provided the process for termination of relationship in
- **C6.05.** has been followed. Before this congregation takes action to transfer to another Lutheran church body, it shall consult with representatives of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
- **C7.04.** If the voting members of this congregation present at a legally called and conducted special meeting of this congregation vote to become independent or relate to a non-Lutheran church body, title to property of this congregation shall continue to reside in this congregation only with the consent of the Synod Council. The Synod Council, after consultation with this congregation by the process established by the synod, may give approval to the request to become independent or to relate to a non-Lutheran church body, in which case title shall remain with the majority of this congregation. If the Synod Council fails to give such approval, title shall remain with those members who desire to continue as a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In neither case does title to this congregation's property transfer to the synod.

Appendix C: Relevant Portion of ELCA's Model Constitution

- **C7.05.** Notwithstanding the provisions of ***C7.02.** and ***C.7.03.** above, where this congregation has received property from the synod pursuant to a deed or other instrument containing restrictions under provision 9.71.a. of the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, this congregation accepts such restrictions and:
 - a. Shall not transfer, encumber, mortgage, or in any way burden or impair any right, title, or interest in the property without prior approval of the Synod Council.
 - b. Shall—upon written demand by the Synod Council, pursuant to ¶13.23. of the constitution of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin—reconvey and transfer all right, title, and interest in the property to the synod.

Chapter 8. MEMBERSHIP

- **C8.01.** Members of this congregation shall be those baptized persons on the roll of this congregation at the time that this constitution is adopted and those who are admitted thereafter and who have declared and maintain their membership in accordance with the provisions of this constitution and its bylaws.
- **C8.02.** Members shall be classified as follows:
 - a. **Baptized members** are those persons who have been received by the Sacrament of Holy Baptism in this congregation, or, having been previously baptized in the name of the Triune God, have been received by certificate of transfer from other Lutheran congregations or by affirmation of faith.
 - b. **Confirmed members** are baptized persons who have been confirmed in this congregation, those who have been received by adult baptism or by transfer as confirmed members from other Lutheran congregations, or baptized persons received by affirmation of faith.
 - c. **Voting members** are confirmed members. Such confirmed members, during the current or preceding calendar year, shall have communed in this congregation and shall have made a contribution of record to this congregation. Members of this congregation who have satisfied these basic standards shall have the privilege of voice and vote at every regular and special meeting of this congregation as well as the other rights and privileges ascribed to voting members by the provisions of this constitution and its bylaws. They shall not have voted as a seasonal member of another congregation of this church in the previous two calendar months.
 - d. **Associate members** are persons holding membership in other ELCA congregations who wish to retain such membership but desire to participate in the life and mission of this congregation. These individuals have all the privileges and duties of membership except voting rights or other rights and privileges ascribed to voting members by the provisions of this constitution and its bylaws.

Appendix C: Relevant Portion of ELCA's Model Constitution

e. **Seasonal members** are voting members of other ELCA congregations of this church who wish to retain such membership but desire to participate in the life and mission of this congregation, including exercising limited voting rights in this congregation. The Congregation Council may grant seasonal membership to such persons provided that this congregation is a member of a synod where the Synod Council has approved seasonal member voting on its territory. Such seasonal members shall have all the privileges and duties of voting members except that:

- 3) they shall not have the right to vote on any matter concerning or affecting the affiliation of this congregation with this church;

Chapter 10. CONGREGATION MEETING

- **C10.03.** Notice of all meetings of this congregation shall be given at the services of worship on the preceding two consecutive Sundays and by mail to all [voting] members at least 10 days in advance of the date of the meeting. The posting of such notice in the regular mail, with the regular postage affixed or paid, sent to the last known address of such members shall be sufficient.
- **C10.06.** All actions approved by the congregation shall be by majority vote of those voting members present and voting, except as otherwise provided in this constitution or by state law.
- **C10.08.** This congregation may hold meetings by remote communication, including electronically and by telephone conference, as long as there is an opportunity for simultaneous aural communication. To the extent permitted by state law, notice of all meetings may be provided electronically.

Chapter 12. CONGREGATION COUNCIL

- **C12.05.** The Congregation Council shall be responsible for the financial and property matters of this congregation.
 - a. The Congregation Council shall be the board of [trustees] [directors] of this congregation, and as such shall be responsible for maintaining and protecting its property and the management of its business and fiscal affairs. It shall have the powers and be subject to the obligations that pertain to such boards under the laws of the State of Wisconsin, except as otherwise provided herein.
 - b. The Congregation Council shall not have the authority to buy, sell, or encumber real property unless specifically authorized to do so by a meeting of this congregation.
 - e. The Congregation Council shall ascertain that the financial affairs of this congregation are being conducted efficiently, giving particular attention to the prompt payment of all obligations and to the regular forwarding of mission support monies to the synod treasurer.
 - f. The Congregation Council shall be responsible for this congregation's investments and its total insurance program.

Appendix D: Coniaci Information and Resources

Bishop Martin Halom

517-505-6509

mhalom@nswsi.org

Currently Vacant, Director of Lutheran Planned Giving of Wisconsin

Region Gift Planner to help you with distribution of assets and a Legacy Directive Plan.

Attorney Cindy Hangartner

ELCA member of Peace Lutheran in Pigeon Falls to help file official closing paperwork

Cindy.hangartner@vonbriesen.com, 715-214-1805

ELCA Region 5 Archivist

Sue Dodd ELCA Region 5 Archives

Wartburg Theological Seminary 333 Wartburg Place

Dubuque, IA 52003-5004

(563) 589-0320

E-mail: Region5archives@wartburgseminary.edu



Additional resources

The Good Friday Collaborative

[Church Closure and Merger Blog — Good Friday Collaborative](#)

[So You Think Your Church Might Close? 10 Practical Actions to Start Now — Good Friday Collaborative](#)

Books

[Embracing God's Future without Forgetting the Past: A Conversation about Loss, Grief, and Nostalgia in Congregational Life: Girlinghouse, Michael K.: 9781506458885: Amazon.com: Books](#)

[The Last Pastor: Faithfully Steering a Closing Church: Cafferata, Gail: 9780664264987: Amazon.com: Books](#)

Appendix E: Energy Audit

Holy Fork in the Road Congregational Energy Audit

Here are four conversations for the church council and other members of the congregation that will be helpful for a Holy Fork in the Road moment. Use these questions to help your congregation discern its next most faithful step and which path to take moving forward in God's mission. Create time and place for 30-60 minutes to discuss each section. Take notes and summarize the conversation. Begin with prayer. Read Luke 10: Keep God in the conversation. Ask God questions. What is God's will for our future? Do we have the energy to continue to do God's work here? Have we finished the work God has given us to do in this place?

1.SPIRITUAL ENERGY

- a) How many active members between the ages of 35-64?
- b) How many members are active in ministry beyond worship?
- c) How many are active in adult Bible Study?
- d) Is the energy level for ministry beyond worship: very high, high, average, low, very low?
- e) Does your congregation have a full council?
 - How difficult is it to find members to serve on the council?
 - How many of your current council members have served more than two terms?
 - What does your constitution say about term limits?
- f) How would you describe the spiritual passion of members to continue to bring in the harvest for Jesus' sake?

Spiritual Energy Summary

Does our congregation have enough spiritual energy for ministry for the next:

- 1 year - YES/NO/I'm not sure
- 3 years - YES/NO/I'm not sure
- 5 years - YES/NO/I'm not sure

2.MISSIONAL ENERGY

- a) When you think about your congregation do you believe there is a possibility for redevelopment/rebirth/ revitalization? What would it take for that to happen?
- b) What is the best possible future you can imagine for your congregation in the next 5 years/10 years? Does your congregation have the energy to make that happen?
- c) Does your congregation have a clear sense of purpose? Will this purpose propel it forward into God's mission to redeem the world?

Appendix E: Energy Audit

Missional Energy Summary

Does this congregation have enough missional energy for:

- 1 year - YES/NO/I'm not sure
- 3 years - YES/NO/I'm not sure
- 5 years - YES/NO/I'm not sure

3.FINANCIAL ENERGY

What percentage of your income is used for...

- a) building maintenance
- b) building debt
- c) staff salary
- d) programs
- e) mission beyond the congregation
- f) How much do you have in reserves?
Saving, endowment, cash?
How would you describe your cash flow pattern?

Financial Energy Summary

Does this congregation have the financial energy for the next

- 1 year - YES/NO/I'm not sure
- 3 years - YES/NO/I'm not sure
- 5 years - YES/NO/I'm not sure

4. DEMOGRAPHICS REALITIES

- a) Has the population of your context changed in the last 10 years?
- b) How many ELCA congregations are within 5 /10 /15 miles of your building?
- c) How many Methodist, Presbyterian, UCC, or Episcopal congregations nearby ?
- d) How healthy are the 3 closest to your building?
- e) How many students are in Sunday School or confirmation?
- f) Describe the enrollment trends of your closest schools.

Appendix E: Discussion Guide

Begin by reading together Luke 10

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest...8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you...'

Reflect

- Is the harvest complete in your geographic place?
- Do the laborers have energy to bring in the rest of the harvest?
- Could you share your resources with others with more energy to continue the harvest?

Consider Holy Fork in the Road Options

- Put more energy in Faithful Innovation and circle back through a renewal cycle leading to rebirth, redevelopment, redefinition growth and stability for sustained mission
- Put more energy in learning new ways of being the church through Fresh Expressions
- Shared Ministry/Part time pastor
- SAM instead of a Pastor
- Consolidation
- Merger
- Parallel Development
- Relocation
- Becoming a Mobile Church
- Closure

Bible Study

- **Τετέλεσται** -it is finished (John 19:30)

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

- **τέλος** an end, completed, purpose fulfilled, finished, accomplished, to bring to conclusion, maturity or perfection
- Gardening-end of the season-the harvest is completed-everything is done-just the compost and leaves intentionally left to fertilize next year's produce.
- No one says that leaving the garden in the fall after the good harvest was collected that it is a failure only that the season is over, it is finished, it is completed and fulfilled its purpose.

Appendix E: Discussion Guide

Finished Not Failed

When to have this conversation....

You can have this conversation sooner rather than later, before...

1. You run out of money, hit bottom and have no energy
2. Three of your council members are in the nursing home and you no longer worship in the winter because the members don't drive on snow and/or they go south or
3. You can no longer hold a legal congregational meeting and will then
4. Need to go under synod administration



I share these resources with you because I have hope in the resurrection. If indeed we have finished the work God has given us to do at this time and at this place, then let us leave the seeds of faith so the next generation will come to know and love Jesus. We have finished not failed and new ministry will grow from the seeds planted by the previous generations of faithful followers of Jesus.

Bishop Martin Halom
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

I have fought the good fight;
I have finished the race;
I have kept the faith.
~2 Timothy 4:7

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; and 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.

~Ecclesiastes 3:1-4



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Ending with Grace, Dialog Works Course, Peter Soli and Erin Power, DEM Eastern North Dakota Synod ELCA.

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Leaving a Legacy of Mission and Ministry, ELCA



Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America