

A Service of Healing for those whose Marriage is Ending or has Ended

Working Group on Worship

Theology and Discipleship

The Uniting Church in Australia

NOTES

- i This service should be seen alongside A Service of Healing in *Uniting in Worship, Leader's Book* (pp. 416-426). In A Service of Healing, there are three parts: the Healing of the Sick or Disabled, the Healing of a Personal Relationship, and Healing within Society. Similarly, A Service of Healing for those whose Marriage is Ending or has Ended seeks to offer pastoral care to the person or persons requesting it; it is not intended to enact the ending of a marriage.
- ii It is presumed that adequate counselling will have taken place prior to this service both to see if the marriage relationship can be restored, and to prepare the person(s) for the service. The minister should also ensure that any children have been offered appropriate counselling.

This pastoral service will always be an intimate service. It could take place in a variety of settings, e.g. in a home or church. There may only be one of the couple present, with a few friends and witnesses, but in every case there should be representatives of the wider church present.

Sometimes, there will be a need to confess sin which is inappropriate even in this intimate setting. In this case, A Service of Reconciliation in *Uniting in Worship, Leader's Book* (pp. 427-431) may be used in counselling prior to this healing service, so that the sin may be confessed and the declaration of forgiveness made. If this has occurred, the Prayer of Confession in this service may be omitted.

- iii The resources in this service may be used in the early stages of the ending of a marriage, and at the time when a person is ready to let go of what has been and move on in life. It may be that in the early stages, the person may need help in grieving and examining his/her life; at a later time, he/she may need to receive affirmation in "hearing God's call for new life" (Minute 97.31.12, the Eighth Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia). However, the content of the service will correspond to spiritual and psychological stages, rather than to public stages (such as the finalising of a divorce). A person may need to express grief and lament, or look for affirmation and forgiveness, after the divorce becomes final, or even when they are looking to make a new commitment.
- iv Where only one of the couple is present, the (former) spouse should be mentioned by name and included in the prayers of intercession.
- v Where there are children from the marriage, they should be named and the ongoing relationship with them acknowledged. It may be appropriate to refer to the pain and grief of separation from children; it is unwise to refer to the love of just one parent for the children. Where there are ongoing responsibilities for children, these should be acknowledged.
- vi A number of powerful and intense emotions may be expressed both during the preparation of the service and as it occurs. The minister should not presume to know what a person is feeling, but seek accurately to reflect the felt emotions in the service. This should always be done positively. It may be pertinent to use a symbol, such as a wedding ring, photo or wedding certificate. If the person (or couple) is ready to move on, it may be that such

symbols could be placed on a table in the worship space. The minister should discuss the disposition of any symbols with the person or couple.

In some situations, anger has been ritualised by burning vows, cutting wedding photos and destroying rings. This practice is discouraged in the strongest terms. The destruction of wedding documents or photographs may have legal or negative psychological implications. It may be necessary to talk these matters through with the person and others who may be present.

Other symbols need to be chosen carefully. They need to symbolise letting go and claiming the new. For example, a candle could be extinguished in lament with words of grief, and lit again later in the service, or at the end of the service, to symbolise hope and the assurance of the light of Christ in their lives.

- vii The service comprises resources which will need to be adapted to specific situations. In particular, care should be taken when both names are used (apart from the prayers of intercession) where only one person is present. Where emotions are named, they should reflect the actual feelings of the participant(s).

A Service of Healing for those whose Marriage is Ending or has Ended

GREETING

The grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Let us listen with hope to the words of Scripture.

When the poor and needy seek water,
and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the Lord will answer them.
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

Isaiah 41:17

See what love the Father has given us,
that we should be called children of God;
and that is what we are.

1 John 3:1

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is appointed by God.
The church believes that marriage
is a gift of God in creation
and a means of grace in which a man and a woman
become one in heart, mind and body.

N and N entered into marriage with joy and hope,
affirming their trust in each other and in God
and pledging themselves to each other.

Yet through human frailty,
their love and companionship has become
brokenness and pain.

The indented paragraphs which follow may need to be adapted, particularly if both members of the couple are present. If there are children, they should be named.

Others are affected,
especially *the children and other* members of the family;
friends have divided loyalties
and memories are marred.

We come to stand with N
as she/he grieves the loss of hopes and dreams
and faces the failure of her/his marriage/*in the ending of her/his marriage.*

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

**Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,**

though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

**God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.**

Psalm 46:1-3

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

A selection may be made from this prayer, or other suitable supplications added, or another prayer may be used.

Let us pray:

silence

Merciful God,
for the things we have done that we regret,
forgive us;

for the things we have failed to do that we regret,
forgive us;

for the times we have acted without love,
forgive us;

for the times we have reacted without thought,
forgive us;

for the times we have acted with anger or violence,
forgive us;

for the times we have feared to be ourselves,
forgive us;

for the times we have withdrawn care,
forgive us;

for the times we have failed to forgive,
forgive us.

For hurtful words said and helpful words unsaid,
for unfinished tasks
and unfulfilled hopes,
God of all time
forgive us
and help us
to lay down our burden of regret.

A symbol of letting go (e.g. the extinguishing of a candle, or the placing of items onto a table) may occur here, or during the use of a psalm of lament.

The minister says

By the authority of Jesus Christ
I declare that God has mercy on you,
pardons you and sets you free.
Know that your sins are forgiven
through Jesus Christ your Saviour.
God strengthen you in all goodness
and keep you in eternal life.

Amen.

or

Hear the good news!

Who is in a position to condemn?
Only Christ,
and Christ died for us,
Christ rose for us,
Christ reigns in power for us,
Christ prays for us.

Anyone who is in Christ
is a new creation.
The old life has gone;
a new life has begun.

Know that you are forgiven
and be at peace.

Amen.

Romans 8:34; 2 Corinthians 5:17

READINGS

Suitable passages of Scripture include Eccles. 3.1-8; Lam. 3.22-26; Matt. 11.28-30; John 7:53-8.11;
Rom 8.31-39; Eph. 4:31-32; Col. 3:12-13.

A psalm may be said or sung. Suitable psalms include 23; 30; 121. Where a major emotion is grief,
a psalm of lament may be helpful, e.g. Ps 6:1-7; 22.1-5; 42:1-5; 102.1-7; 130.

Selected verses from Psalm 31 in *Uniting in Worship People's Book* are included below.

If a psalm of lament is included, a symbol of letting go may be used here if not used before.

Psalm of Lament

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.

Incline your ear to me;
make haste to deliver me.

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,
for you are my crag and my stronghold;
for the sake of your name, lead me and guide me.

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble;
**my eye is consumed with sorrow,
and also my throat and my belly.**

For my life is wasted with grief,
and my years with sighing;
**my strength fails me because of affliction,
and my bones are consumed.**

I have become a reproach to all my enemies
and even to my neighbours,
a dismay to those of my acquaintance;
when they see me in the street they avoid me.

Make your face to shine upon your servant,
and in your loving-kindness save me.

Psalm 31.1-3, 9-11, 16

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Intercessions may include

- The person seeking help, and their (former) spouse
- Any children of the marriage, and other family members
- Friends, both those who are supportive and those whose loyalties are divided
- The community of the church
- The future.

ACT OF HEALING

The Act of Healing has three parts. The Laying on of Hands is to be used on all occasions.

The Prayer of Letting Go may be used where the person is ready to move on in God's grace. The Laying on of Hands follows, and provision is also made for the Anointing with Oil.

The Prayer of Letting Go

The person may choose to offer this prayer:

God of infinite comfort and wisdom,
the marriage I once entered has now ended.
I give thanks for all that was good,
and ask to learn from what was not.
Help me to let go of all resentment.
By the power of your Holy Spirit,
give me new life in your service,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The minister and others present say:

**N,
we share your sorrow,
we rejoice in your hope,
we pray for your new life.**

Laying on of Hands

The minister and others present lay hands on the person.

The minister says:

We lay our hands upon you, N,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There may be a time of silence or free prayer.

The minister continues:

May almighty God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
bring you to wholeness in body, mind and spirit,
give you a secure hope and a confident peace,
and keep you in eternal life.

Amen.

The Anointing

If anointing is to take place,
the minister makes the sign of the cross with oil
on the person.

The minister says:

N, we anoint you with oil
for cleansing and healing
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The minister may add:

May the Holy Spirit poured out upon you
yield the fruit of pardon, trust and joy.

Amen.

Where there is to be Holy Communion, the order in *Uniting in Worship, Leader's Book*, is followed from the Peace.
The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (p. 93), or one of the alternative prayers, is used.

If there is no Communion, the Peace is still included, and the service then concludes with the Blessing.

THE PEACE

O God, you will speak peace to your people,
to those who turn to you in their hearts.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

THE SETTING OF THE TABLE

The gifts of bread and wine are brought forward; or, being already in place, are uncovered and made ready for use.

An invitation such as the following may be given. A prayer of approach may be offered.

God says,
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.

Isaiah 43.1b

This is the table of the Lord.
Come, receive the signs
of Christ's suffering and new life.
Come in faith and hope,
for Christ is here.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper continues according to the order in *Uniting in Worship*.

After the distribution, the following Prayer After Communion may be offered, or another used.

Let us pray:
God of life,
you have lifted our hearts,
and shown us the way of freedom.
We have tasted your brokenness,
and received your wholeness.
Send us out in the Spirit's power
to embrace your future,
in Christ's name.
Amen.

BLESSING

The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself;
the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service;
the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.
Amen.

Resources

These resources offer songs which may be suitable for this service, where there is appropriate musical accompaniment:

The Australian Hymn Book, Collins, 1977

Together in Song - The Australian Hymn Book II, HarperCollinsReligious, 1999

John L. Bell, *Come all You People: Shorter Songs for Worship*, Wild Goose Publications, 1994

John L. Bell, *Psalms of Patience, Protest and Praise*, Wild Goose Publications, 1993

Suitable alternative prayers may be found in the following:

Kathy Galloway (ed.), *The Pattern of our Days*, Wild Goose Publications, 1996

Kerrie Hyde, *A Woman's Healing Song: Prayers of Consolation for the Separated and Divorced*, Twenty-Third Publications, 1993

The Lutheran Church of Australia, 'Breakdown of Marriage' in *Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care*, Openbook Publishers, 1998 (This book is a very useful resource indeed, and includes pastoral resources as well as a service.)

Dorothy McRae-McMahon, 'Service of restoration at the ending of a marriage', in *Echoes of our Journey*, JBCE, 1993.

We have drawn from resources in

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Book of Common Worship, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993

Kathy Galloway, 'A liturgy for laying down and letting go', in Kathy Galloway (ed.), *The Pattern of Our Days*, Wild Goose Publications. Published in Australia by Willow Connection Pty Ltd.
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