

THE CONSOLIDATION & CLOSING OF CONGREGATIONS In The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

Consolidating Congregations

PREAMBLE

The consolidating of two or more congregations is a complex process, with pastoral, spiritual, legal and practical dimensions. The goal is the creation of a new congregation where the combination of people and resources can provide an increased capacity for spreading the Gospel and for spiritual growth.

Congregations exploring the consolidation process generally do so in response to shifting demographics, diminished numbers and financial resources. However, those exploring consolidation should not regard the process as “giving up” or as an admission of failure. On the contrary, congregations that have the courage to enter such a process demonstrate Christian maturity, faithfulness and strength rooted in the hope that a resulting new creation will provide God’s people a fresh start, beginning anew from a place of strength and renewed confidence.

A consolidation is different than a yoked congregation. Yoked congregations remain organizationally, legally and canonically separate. Generally it is the clergy or on some occasions a specific ministry that “yokes” the two entities.

This document sets forth the various steps and procedures in the consolidation process. These procedures will vary given the unique circumstances of the consolidation. Some examples of various types of consolidations include:

1. Two or more congregations consolidate, all existing corporations dissolving and a new corporation emerging with an entirely new name and identity. (i.e. Nativity, Mineola and St. Andrew’s, Williston Park became “Church of the Resurrection”); one or more of the properties may be sold.
2. Two or more congregations consolidate, all existing corporations dissolving and a new corporation emerging but the original names remain in some form (i.e. Trinity-St. John’s, Hewlett). In this situation one or more of the properties may be sold.
3. A mission, aided parish, or parish and a second congregation may merge, the mission, aided parish or parish dissolving and being subsumed into the second parish. (This is not technically a “consolidation” per the Religious Incorporations Law of the State of New York but a “merger”).
4. An extinct (either by petition or action of Diocesan Council) mission or congregation merges with an existing congregation.

A. TESTING THE WATERS/EXPLORATION

The invitation to explore consolidation among two or more parishes may be initiated by one or more of the parties, the local deanery or the Bishop. When two or more congregations begin to explore consolidation in earnest, the process must include the Bishop from the very beginning. The Bishop's office must be made aware of the intentions of congregations hoping to consolidate because ultimately such an intention will require the consent of the Bishop and the Standing Committee. However, more importantly, it provides the Bishop the opportunity to offer support and to provide resources that will aid the congregations in their discernment, including a liaison from the Bishop's office to assist with facilitation and planning.

Once an invitation to explore has been accepted, the congregations should work with each other to discern, explore and envision a future together. A Bishop's office liaison or Church Consultant (could be a local dean, trained clergy or lay person or a representative from the Diocesan Offices) will provide technical, spiritual and formational support to the respective congregations in this regard. There are various skills and tools that they can offer that will assist the process in moving forward in a thoughtful, clear and productive manner. A skilled Church Consultant can assist the respective congregations to sift through the various dynamics that inevitably emerge in such exploration such as, feelings of guilt and loss, aversion to risk, anxiety, fear, etc. A Church Consultant can also help mobilize energy and excitement.

An initial discernment period should demonstrate evidence of the proposed consolidation being shared with the local deanery and neighboring congregations and that there is initial evidence that the general plan will work (i.e. – they are proposing to situate the consolidated parish where there is need and the promise of growth).

Note: At this point it may be helpful to deploy a clerk/secretary who can begin capturing the ideas, notes etcetera presented at exploration meetings. The ideas that have been generated in a working document will be helpful in taking the next steps in this process.

Providing Pastoral Care

A number of important factors must be considered when considering a consolidation. Many of these factors are mechanical and procedural. However, pastoral care and concern for the congregants must be at play throughout the process.

Stages of Grief

While going through the process of discerning consolidation and then following through with all the steps necessary to effect the actual consolidation, congregants will often traverse the various stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance as, in some measure, a consolidation also means the loss of a former reality. Consolidation means that two churches die and a new church is born. Not everyone will go through the stages in lock-step nor at the same speed. It is important for church leaders to be sensitive to these realities in others and in themselves. Clergy and lay leaders will be especially well served by being good listeners.

Open and Clear Communications

The consolidation process requires open and clear communications from congregational leaders (clergy and vestry) so that people within the congregation are well informed in a spirit of transparency and that active listening to the various feelings that necessarily emerge at a time such as this is maintained.

Pastoral Care for the Members

Pastoral care for the members should be provided throughout the process, helping them to work through stages of grief, entertaining questions, and being a full participant in the process of inventing something new. Sometimes special liturgies that honor the past or celebrate and release former ministries will be of comfort to members of the parish.

B. MORE FORMAL EXPLORATION

If after an initial period of discernment the congregations believe it is right to consolidate they should make their intentions known to the bishop in writing. The letter should contain the following:

1. A general statement on how the church communities came together, what synergy has strengthened them thus far;
2. A brief overview of the plan for consolidation including: sale of property, mission focus, relocation, development ideas etc.
3. A general statement as to how the church and community will be better served by the consolidation;
4. General statement on the financial feasibility of the proposed consolidation. Will this be sustainable?
5. Evidence that consolidation plans have been shared with the local Dean, Clericus, Deanery, and when applicable, neighborhood representatives.

The following documents from each of the congregations should accompany the letter to the bishop:

1. Copies of Certificates of Incorporation
2. Real Property Appraisal of property intended to be sold (if applicable)
3. Copies of deed to all properties owned by the congregations.
4. Full financial reports including operating budget and investments.
5. Audit Reports
6. Parochial Reports
7. Questionnaire (cf. Appendix B)

The bishop's office, having received the letter of intention from the consolidating congregations, will set up a meeting with all vestry members and the consultant. The meeting will provide an opportunity for the consolidating congregations to review their letter of intention with the bishop and for all involved to work cooperatively and to ask questions that may arise.

At the meeting, the following will be asked of the consolidating congregations concerning financial obligations/encumbrances (cf. Appendix B)

1. Have the congregations made pledges for the support of the Diocese?
2. Is there evidence of any existing and/or future debt?
3. Is there evidence that congregations are current on loan repayments and will be able to meet those obligations going forward?
4. Are there any current leases?

The following will be asked of the consolidating congregations regarding property:

1. Are there plans for the sale, conveyance, lease or encumbrance (mortgage) of any church buildings, church property, or rectories as a result of the consolidation?
2. Is there a plan for the use of any vacant buildings, properties, or rectories a result of the consolidation?
3. What is the proposed distribution/liquidation of any personal property of the congregations as a result of the consolidation?
4. Is there evidence of adequate property/liability insurance on all properties?
5. Is there evidence of major maintenance or repair expenses that could not be met by the consolidated congregation?

n.b Each parish must separately tend to its fiduciary obligations, providing canonical, legal and pastoral oversight until such time as the legal consolidation has occurred. This includes submission of audit reports, parochial reports and delegate certificates to Diocesan Convention.

C. FORMAL PLAN/VISION FOR THE FUTURE

If it is determined from the meeting with the Bishop that a consolidation will enhance the ministry of the church and be sustainable, a formal strategic development plan outlining concrete goals, objectives and hoped-for outcome encompassing the following will be requested:

1. Ministry Plan (financial budget for the new congregation)
2. Does the consolidation envision a development initiative (i.e. housing, outreach ministry partnership).
3. What are the ministry aspirations of the new consolidated congregation? How does the new congregation propose to embody and express the mission of the Church?
4. What are the proposed names for the new congregation, if there is to be a name change?
5. What are the clergy needs? What gifts and skills will be necessary in the clergy person? Is there evidence that the new congregation will be able to financially support and sustain a clergy person based on the Resolution for Base Minimum Clergy Compensation?
6. Declaration of Conformity and Obedience to Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of Episcopal Church and Constitutions and Canons of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Long Island.

If the sale of one or more properties is going to be part of the consolidation plan, a formal appraisal of said property should be prepared. Names of reputable appraisers may be obtained through the Bishop's Office.

D. CANONICAL AND LEGAL MATTERS

The consolidation of congregations requires the separate consent of the Bishop and the Standing Committee. It will also require the expertise of an attorney (securing and paying the attorney is the responsibility of the consolidating congregations) who will oversee the various legal matters that arise from such an enterprise including the following:

1. Creating The Consolidation Agreement
2. A court order to dissolve old corporations and create new corporation.
3. Assist with sale of property, if applicable
4. Forming a new religious corporation

The first step in this Canonical and Legal process is a resolution of the individual vestries setting forth their consent to consolidate. It is highly recommended that the RESOLUTION be crafted by the Chancellor of the Diocese or a qualified attorney and adopted by the vestry. The Chancellor should also initially review the Consolidation Agreement to ensure that it is done properly and in accordance with the Religious Corporations Law of the State of New York and the Canons of the Church. This step will ease the process in the long run. If there are no problems with the document the following should then be submitted to the Bishop's Office together in one packet:

1. Formal letter signed by the rector/clergy-in-charge and wardens requesting consolidation of the congregations.
2. A brief abstract/narrative that outlines the rationale for the consolidation
3. Consolidation Agreement
4. Each respective congregation's executed vestry resolution requesting consolidation and secretary's certificate (cf. Appendix C & D). If the sale or encumbrance of property is part of the deal that language must be contained in the resolution as well.

The Chancellor will review the above as a whole and will provide his council to the Bishop and the Standing Committee. The Bishop and the Standing Committee will meet and deliberate. If consents of the Bishop and the Standing Committee are granted, the representing attorney can proceed with court approvals and with such approvals begin the process of drawing up incorporation documents for the new parish. The attorney may well be involved in any closings related to property being sold.

E. ESTABLISHING THE NEW CONGREGATION

At this stage the two congregations (though still separate corporate entities) may well be working together as one, worshiping together, etc. Generally the congregations have come together long before the actual legal consolidation has happened. However, at this point they should be making concrete decisions about the following concerning their future together (most will have been doing some of this work all along).

1. Sale of Property (securing a realtor), if necessary.
2. If a property is to be sold and vacated, a service of de-consecration must be scheduled with the Bishop's Office. Pursuant to Title II Canon 6 (3) of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church deconsecration requires the consent of the Bishop and the Standing Committee (cf. Appendix F).
3. If the property is to be left vacant for a period of time, a plan should be established for the oversight, insurance and safety of the property.
4. A sacred objects committee should be making recommendations about what if anything from the prior churches will be brought into the new congregation.
5. Working groups should be envisioning and planning how the ministries of the new congregation will function.
6. Clergy Deployment details, working with Diocese Office for Transition Ministry
7. Marketing, connecting etc.
8. Signage and Media/website etc.
9. Development of property upon which new congregation will be established, if necessary.
10. Organizing the life of the consolidated congregation
11. Questions about staffing should be raised and reviewed.

Once the actual court petition has been granted and a new Corporation created the following will happen as well:

1. Nomination process for new vestry members;
2. Establishment of a date for an annual meeting (based on the new certificate of incorporation).
3. Schedule a Celebration of New Ministry/Consecration of new facilities (if applicable) with the Bishop's Office
4. Pursuant to the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island Title VII. Canon 3 the parish must apply for union with the church and this diocese. (cf. Appendix E).
5. Updating new parish data with Convention of the Diocese, Diocesan offices, deanery, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and secular/business neighborhood.

As mentioned above, each consolidation will have its own rhythm. Regardless, it is important to note that along the way there will be setbacks, hurt feelings, and certainly a sense of loss for what was. Thus it is essential that the process from the beginning to the very end be highly pastoral, prayerful and contain a measure of good 'ole humor which helps us all to maintain a sense of humility and perspective. The consolidation process is a very rewarding, dynamic and inspiring venture at the end of which is an opportunity to live out God's vision of hope and a new future in Christ.

The Closing of a Congregation

PREAMBLE: It is not the intention of the Bishop or the Diocese to seek the closure of congregations. On the contrary, it is the work of the Bishop and the Diocese to expand and embolden the ministry of Christ in the local church and to be of support to local congregations, missions and ministries. However, from time to time, local congregations, the Bishop or the wider Diocese faithfully evaluate ministries that may well have run their course. The result of this discernment sometimes leads to a process of redefinition and new beginnings. Sometimes it means that a ministry has come to an end, leading to the courageous and faithful act of closing a congregation.

Life-Cycle Theory

Every living entity in God's creation has a lifecycle. Communities of faith also have a life cycle. There are times in the lifecycle of a church when decline is evident. Decline happens as a result of various forces both internal and external. Sometimes a congregation can redefine their focus and transform their decline into rebirth. At other times decline is beyond the control of the congregation and death is inevitable.

As Christians we believe that Christ who died and rose has transformed death, robbed the grave of its victory and thus we face death with the faith and hope of the resurrection. With death comes grief, sadness, confusion, anger and a range of emotions – even denial. However, in death we are not forsaken but loved, transformed and embraced by the love of Christ who is always making of us a new creation. Even in death God makes all things new.

When a congregation has declined and has likely died, closure is a faithful and courageous consideration. The following sets forth various pastoral and strategic resources for congregations who are to be closed and seeks to be a shepherding guide for all who will engage in such a holy process.

A. WHO CAN INITIATE THE CLOSURE OF A CONGREGATION?

A vestry in consultation with parish may initiate the idea of closure when it believes it has explored various remedies for redefining its mission to no avail. The Bishop, in his pastoral role as chief shepherd of the diocese, in the name of good stewardship can raise the hard questions of a congregation whose decline is evident and where serious financial, property and other variables are of serious concern to the bishop. Title VII Canon 3 of The Canons of the Diocese of Long Island states that, "if, in any congregation, there are less than twenty-five (25) worshippers on a regular basis for a one year period, the unit may be closed." (cf. Appendix E)

A survey of the history of our diocese demonstrates that the closure of congregation is not a contemporary matter. Throughout the past 150 years, parishes across our diocese have closed for various reasons: shifting demographics, lack of sustainability, sustained decline over time, urban renewal, or that a congregation for these and other reasons has determined that they would be stronger merging resources with another congregation. There are many

good reasons to close, not the least of which is that a congregation may conclude that its ministry in a particular place and context has come to an end.

When a congregation has determined that it should discern closure or that the diocese determines such an evaluation, a liaison from the Bishop's office shall be assigned to help with that discernment. The Bishop himself takes these decisions very seriously and will be closely involved. There are tools of discernment and processes that we can deploy to help a congregation ask the correct questions. Such tools in a retreat-like setting can begin to help the congregation focus its rationale for closure.

From time to time, an unincorporated mission will decide that its ministry has come to an end. While the spiritual and moral weight of closure is the same as with a congregation, the legal and canonical dimensions are less complicated. The mission congregation can simply petition the bishop for a dissolution (with good reason) and the mission can cease to exist.

If a congregation on their own has determined that it is time for them to close, they must notify the Bishop, in writing (if possible) of their discernment, hopes and the conclusions that have led their resolve for closure. The Bishop and the Bishop's designees will work closely with the congregation throughout the process.

B. PASTORAL CARE

A number of important factors must be considered once a determination to close has been established. Many of these factors are mechanical and procedural. However, the first of these steps is pastoral. We must first consider that that church is primarily a gathering of God's people. Thus the process must begin with our care for people.

Stages of Grief

While going through the process of deciding to close a congregation and then following through with all the steps necessary for the closing, all involved will go through the various stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Unfortunately, not everyone will go through the stages in lock-step nor at the same speed. Understanding of and proper attention to each person's stage in the grief process will facilitate following the steps needed to close the congregation. Listening skills are paramount in this process.

Open and Clear Communications

When closing a congregation, it is vitally important that open and clear communications are maintained by the congregational leaders (clergy and vestry), that people within the congregation are well informed in a spirit of transparency and that active listening to the various feelings that necessarily emerge at a time such as this is maintained. The Clerk of the Vestry should maintain thorough minutes and notes of all discussions and actions.

Pastoral Care for the Members

Pastoral care for the members should be provided throughout the process, helping them to work through stages of grief, entertaining questions, and being a full participant in the actual closing process, planning the de-consecration liturgy (when appropriate), etc. Often lay and clergy leaders from the Deanery will be asked to provide support, encouragement and hospitality for members who will be looking for a new spiritual home.

C. FORMAL STEPS

The closing congregation will be asked to complete the Questionnaire found in Appendix F and be prepared to address the following questions:

1. Are there any leases in force?
2. Is there a cemetery?
3. Is there a columbarium?
4. Are there any lawsuits in play?
5. What to do with the property and resources (worship appointments, Sunday School material, etc.) of the congregation. The real property and assets of a closed congregation revert to the Trustees of the Estate Belonging to the Diocese. In most cases a portion, or even all of the assets will be reinvested in mission initiatives or in some way offered to enhance neighboring congregations.
6. What does the Certificate of Incorporation and or other legal documents (if applicable) say? These must be obtained and analyzed by the Chancellor of the Diocese.
7. The deed to the property must be obtained and reviewed by the Chancellor.
8. Financial Review - A designee from the Bishop's Office will obtain the most recent parochial report, audit reports and all other bank and financial records, and advise the Bishop of the financial situation of the church. Is there outstanding debt?

n.b The parish must tend to its fiduciary obligations, providing canonical, legal and pastoral oversight until such time as official closure has occurred. This includes submission of audit reports, parochial reports and delegate certificates to Diocesan Convention. However, in certain circumstances, portions of parish management such as finances and property oversight may already be transferring over to the Diocesan Offices during the closing process, as needed.

D. CLOSURE AND DECONSECRATION

While the above questions are being raised and determinations made, the actions of either the parish or the Diocese to close the congregation must be moved into play as follows:

1. If the Congregation has elected to close, a resolution of at least 2/3 members voting in the affirmative and secretary's certificate must be submitted to the bishop's office.
2. If the action of Diocesan Council to declare a parish extinct per the canons is the instrument of closure, then a resolution must be adopted and voted upon by Diocesan Council acting as Convention in recess.
3. Consent of the Standing Committee required for deconsecration pursuant to Title II Cn. 6 (3) of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church (cf. Appendix F).
4. Arrangements must be made for any remaining members of the parish to be transfer membership to another parish.
5. Notice should be sent to ecumenical partners, civic groups that may have met in the church property. It is important that the closing church honor its neighbors.
6. Date set for the de-consecration of the building with the Bishop's Office. Notice of the event should be communicated to members, deanery, neighbors and ecumenical and inter-faith partners. Every effort should be made to include the members of the closing congregation in planning and involvement in the de-consecration liturgy.

E. CANONICAL, LEGAL and LOGISTICAL PROCEDURES

The following must happen once the congregation has been closed and the church deconsecrated:

1. The property must be secured, making sure that there are arrangements in place for its upkeep (cutting the grass, removal of sign, etc.).
2. Upon the extinction of a congregation The Trustees of the Estate shall take possession of and administer the property. A decision will be made whether or not to sell the property or to repurpose in some way.
3. The Chancellor will legally dissolve the corporation (assuming church is incorporated), and reps. of the church shall complete corporate dissolution documents.
4. The property deeds will be turned over to the Bishop's Office to make sure that they are available for the preparation of closing documents. Deeds of transfer to the Diocese will be prepared and signed by authorized personnel of the congregation.
5. The Archdeacon or local dean, the clergy person of the closing congregation, and a member of the Bishop's staff shall inventory the contents of the building. From there a decision will be made by the Bishop as to a process for the disposition of resources. Vestments and Church Ware shall be brought to the Diocesan Campus.

The business of the closed church must be transferred to the business office of the diocese as follows:

1. All the financial information shall be collected and brought to the Diocesan Finance Office. The finance office will work with officers of closing congregation to transfer accounts to the Trustees of the Diocese and will ensure that any and all bills pertaining to the property are paid in a timely manner.
2. All mail including utility bills such as heat, water, and electricity and all other such business mail shall be forwarded to the Diocesan Finance Office at 36 Cathedral Avenue, Garden City, NY 11530.
3. The Diocesan Finance Office will work with the wardens to transfer the insurance coverage from the congregation to the Diocese. Bond insurance should be retained until the books are closed and the bank accounts are closed out.
4. Finalize any remaining payments to the clergy-in-charge.

All congregational records, including Church Register Books of members, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, the parish register, and all vestry minutes shall be gathered and brought to the Registrar of the Diocese who shall:

1. Appraise which records are required for the formal closing of the congregation and which need to be archived; develop a list of all records
2. Plan for the proper disposal of records no longer needed.
3. Make provisions for visual materials such as photographs, videotapes, and films also provide a record of the congregation and determine which visual materials are to be retained and how to best archive them.
4. Transfer of former congregants and provide copies of sacramental docs. as needed.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Excerpt from The Religious Corporations Law of the State of New York concerning the consolidation of incorporated churches:

Section 13. Consolidation of incorporated churches

Two or more incorporated churches may enter into an agreement, under their respective corporate seals, for the consolidation of such corporations, setting forth the name of the proposed new corporation, the denomination, if any, to which it is to belong, and if the churches of such denomination have more than one method of choosing trustees, by which of such methods the trustees are to be chosen, the number of such trustees, the names of the persons to be the first trustees of the new corporation, and the date of its first annual corporate meeting. Such agreement shall not be valid unless approved in the case of Protestant Episcopal churches by the bishop and standing committee of the diocese in which such churches are situated and in the case of churches of other denominations by the governing body of the denomination, if any, to which each church belongs, having jurisdiction over such church.

Each corporation shall thereupon make a separate petition to the supreme court for an order consolidating the corporations, setting forth the denomination, if any, to which the church belongs, that the consent of the governing body to the consolidation, if any, of that denomination having jurisdiction over such church has been obtained, the agreement therefore, and a statement of all the property and liabilities and the amount and sources of the annual income of such petitioning corporation. In its discretion the court may direct that notice of the hearing of such petition be given to the parties interested therein in such manner and for such time as it may prescribe. After hearing all the parties interested, present and desiring to be heard, the court may make an order for the consolidation of the corporations on the terms of such agreement and such other terms and conditions as it may prescribe, specifying the name of such new corporation and the first trustees thereof, and the method by which their successors shall be chosen and the date of its first annual corporate meeting. When such order is made and duly entered, the persons constituting such corporations shall become an incorporated church by, and said petitioning churches shall become consolidated under, the name designated in the order, and the trustees therein named shall be the first trustees thereof, and the future trustees thereof shall be chosen by the method therein designated, and all the estate, rights, powers and property of whatsoever nature belonging to either corporation shall without further act or deed be vested in and transferred to the new corporation as effectually as they were vested in or belonging to the former corporations; and the said new corporation shall be liable for all the debts and liabilities of the former corporations in the same manner and as effectually as if said debts or liabilities had been contracted or incurred by the new corporation. A certified copy of such order shall be recorded in the book for recording certificates of incorporation in each county clerk's office in which the certificate of incorporation of each consolidating church was recorded; or if no such certificate was so recorded, then in the clerk's office of the county in which the principal place of worship or principal office of the new corporation is, or is intended to be, situated.

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire for Parishes intending to Consolidate

Each consolidating parish should complete a questionnaire

Congregational Name: _____

1. Has your congregation made a pledge for the support of the Diocese? Yes /No
2. Is there evidence of any existing and/or future debt or arrearages (i.e. pension, clergy benefits, insurance)? Yes/No If “yes,” please explain further:

3. Is there evidence that either congregation is engaged in a current loan repayment plan? Will the congregation be able to meet these obligations going forward? Yes/ No If “yes,” please explain further:

4. Are there any current leases? Yes/ No If “yes,” please explain further:

5. Does your church have a cemetery? Yes/ No
6. Does your church have a columbarium? Yes/ No
7. Are there plans for the sale, conveyance, or mortgage of any church buildings, church property, or rectories as a result of the consolidation? Yes/No If “yes,” please explain further:

8. Is there evidence of adequate property/liability insurance on all properties? Yes/ No
9. Is there evidence of major maintenance or repair expenses that could not be met by the consolidated congregation? Yes/ No If “yes,” please explain further:

APPENDIX C

Sample Vestry Resolution to Consolidate

The vestry resolution must contain the specifics of the consolidation agreement, thus this template that follows must be adapted to each situation. A resolution must be created for each of the consolidating congregations.

RESOLUTION TO CONSOLIDATE

WHEREAS, St. Swithen's Episcopal Church, Garden City, New York (St. Swithen's) and St. Aiden's in the Swamp Episcopal Church, Floral Park, New York (St. Aiden's) and their wardens and vestry members have engaged in meetings to determine whether the consolidation of the said two parish churches will be in the best interest of both, and

WHEREAS, the vestries of each parish have determined that it will be in their best interests to consolidate, and due deliberation by both vestries having been had thereon,

NOW, THEREFORE, be it

RESOLVED, that St. Swithen's consolidate with St. Aiden's and that a new church to be formed and incorporated under the laws of the State of New York, to be known as St. Francis Episcopal Church be created from such consolidation and be it further,

RESOLVED, that the church building currently located on St. Swithen's property at (formal address of St. Swithen's) be, with the consent of the bishop and the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Long Island be deconsecrated and thereafter demolished and that a new church building be built upon said property, the cost of which shall be paid from the net proceeds of the sale of St. Aiden's of its church building and property currently located at (formal address of St. Aiden's) and be it further,

RESOLVED, that St. Swithen's and St. Aiden's enter into an agreement of consolidation in form substantially similar to that which is annexed hereto, all in accordance with the requirements of the Religious Corporations Law of the State of New York, and be it further,

RESOLVED, that _____ and _____ being the wardens of St. Swithen's be and they hereby are authorized to execute the consolidation agreement on behalf of St. Swithen's as well as any and all further documents as may be required to effectuate the foregoing.



APPENDIX D

Sample Secretary's Certificate

Must accompany the Resolution

I, _____, Clerk of the Vestry of _____, New York, do hereby certify that the Resolution attached hereto is a true copy of a Resolution duly adopted by the Vestry of _____ New York, on the ____ day of _____, and that such resolution has not been amended, modified, or rescinded and remains in full force and effect and such resolution is the only resolution adopted by the Vestry of _____, New York relating to the matter set forth therein.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto signed my name and signature.

Dated: _____

(name of clerk)

Title: Clerk of the Vestry

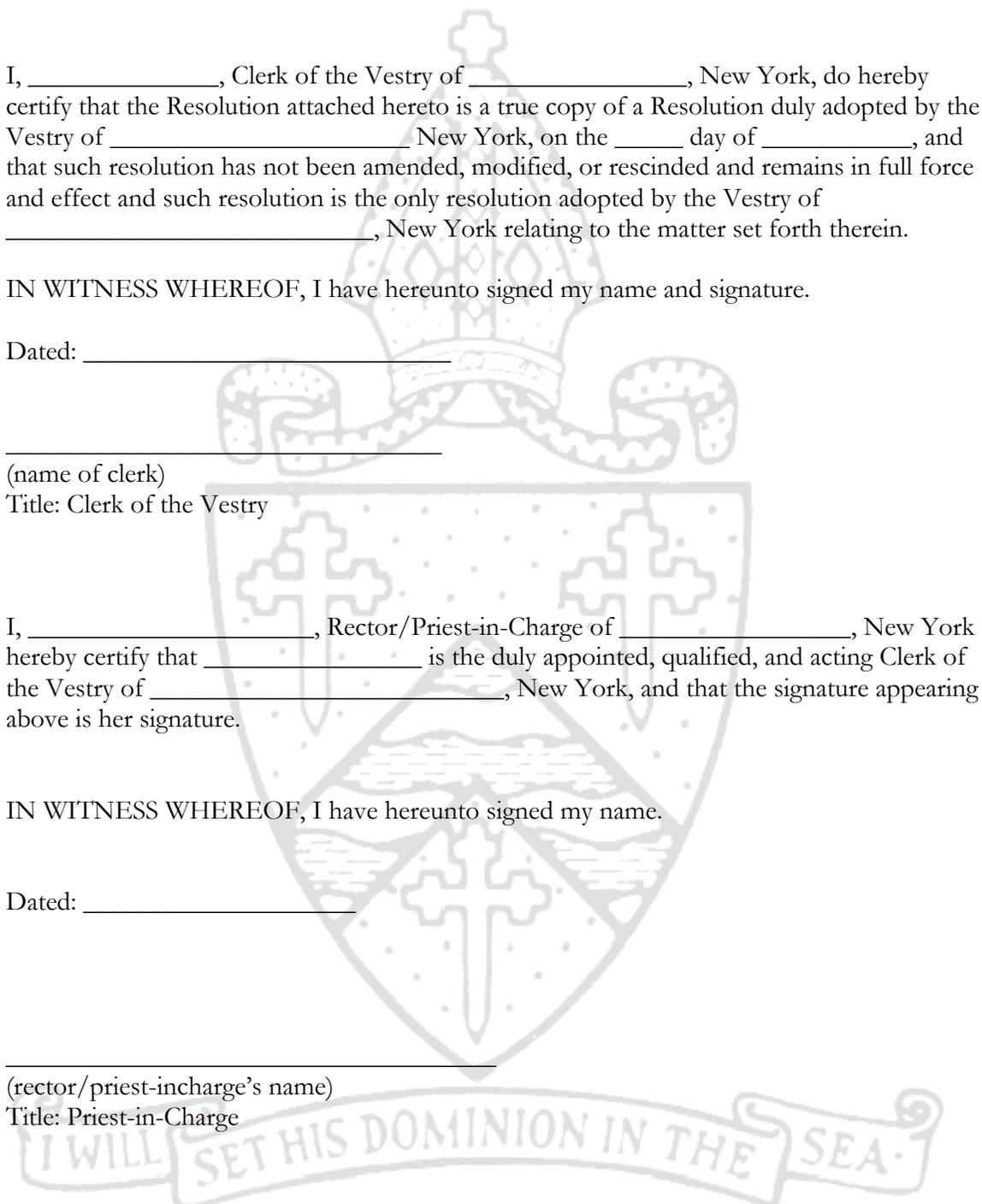
I, _____, Rector/Priest-in-Charge of _____, New York hereby certify that _____ is the duly appointed, qualified, and acting Clerk of the Vestry of _____, New York, and that the signature appearing above is her signature.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto signed my name.

Dated: _____

(rector/priest-incharge's name)

Title: Priest-in-Charge



APPENDIX E

Title VII Canon 3 - Admission of a Church or Parish into union with the church in this Diocese and maintaining such union (ECLI Canons)

SECTION I. Application for Union. An incorporated Church or Parish desiring admission into Union with the Church in the Diocese shall submit to the Ecclesiastical Authority an application in writing signed by the Rector, Wardens, and Vestrymen, setting forth such information as the Ecclesiastical Authority shall require, together with a certified copy of its certificate of incorporation and of resolutions of the Vestry and Congregation declaring the Corporation and Congregation will henceforth in all respects obey and conform with the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the National Constitution, the National Canons, and these Canons.

SECTION II. Procedure for the Standing Committee. Such application shall be referred by the Ecclesiastical Authority, being a Bishop, to the Standing Committee, which shall report its opinion and recommendation thereon to the Bishop with all convenient speed, or if the See be vacant, to the Convention next following such application, in which case it shall also take and transmit the opinion of the Chancellor thereon.

SECTION III. Procedure of the Bishop. After receipt of the opinion and recommendation of the Standing Committee, the Ecclesiastical Authority, being a Bishop, shall, after taking the opinion of the Chancellor, report his own opinion and recommendation to the Convention next following.

SECTION IV. Action of the Convention. The Convention shall act upon the report made to it before adjournment and by a majority vote decide whether such application be granted. If the vote is favorable, the Church or Parish shall thereupon be declared by the President duly admitted into Union, and record made of such admission as prescribed by Canon.

SECTION V. Right to Renew Application. Nothing herein contained shall prevent a Church or Parish, the application of which shall have been denied, from renewing the same. Upon such renewal the procedure shall be the same as upon an original application save that the fact of previous denial shall be reported to the Convention.

SECTION VI. Failure to Maintain Union. Whenever any Church or Parish in Union with the Church in this Diocese shall have failed for two consecutive years prior thereto to maintain religious services according to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Church, or to make a parochial report or to have twenty-five (25) persons of full age belonging to the Parish who have been regular attendants at its worship and contributors to its support for at least twelve (12) months, or has ceased for two (2) consecutive years to have a sufficient number of persons qualified to elect or to serve as Wardens and Vestrymen therein, such Church or Parish, upon report of such fact to the Convention by the Ecclesiastical Authority, may be declared extinct by a majority vote of the delegates present and voting, and thereupon the Trustees of the Estate shall proceed to take possession of and administer its property according to law.

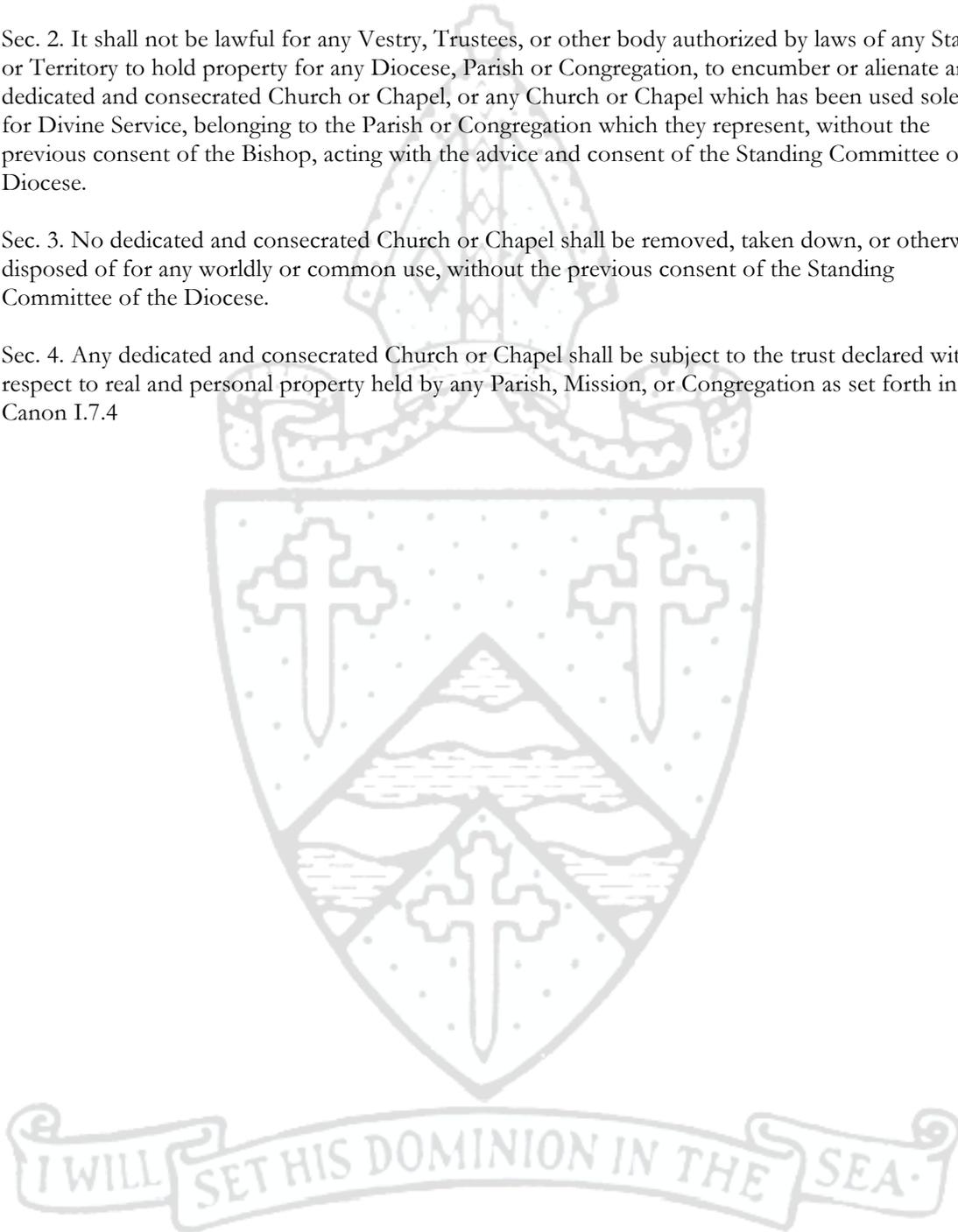
APPENDIX F

Title II Canon 6 Of Dedication and Consecrated Churches (Constitutions and Canons of the Episcopal Church)

Sec. 2. It shall not be lawful for any Vestry, Trustees, or other body authorized by laws of any State or Territory to hold property for any Diocese, Parish or Congregation, to encumber or alienate any dedicated and consecrated Church or Chapel, or any Church or Chapel which has been used solely for Divine Service, belonging to the Parish or Congregation which they represent, without the previous consent of the Bishop, acting with the advice and consent of the Standing Committee of the Diocese.

Sec. 3. No dedicated and consecrated Church or Chapel shall be removed, taken down, or otherwise disposed of for any worldly or common use, without the previous consent of the Standing Committee of the Diocese.

Sec. 4. Any dedicated and consecrated Church or Chapel shall be subject to the trust declared with respect to real and personal property held by any Parish, Mission, or Congregation as set forth in Canon I.7.4



APPENDIX G

Questionnaire for Congregations that are Closing

Completed by vestry/clergy of congregation and submitted to the Bishop's Office at the beginning of the process

Congregation: _____

1. What is the average Sunday attendance for the last 3 years? _____

2. Is there evidence of any existing debt/loans? Yes/No
If "yes," please explain further:

3. Are there any current leases? Yes/ No If "yes," please explain further:

4. Are there any arrearages (i.e. pension, insurance, clergy benefits)? If so, please explain further:

5. Does your church have a cemetery? Yes/ No

6. Does your church have a columbarium? Yes/ No

7. Is there evidence of adequate property/liability insurance on all properties? Yes/ No

8. Is there evidence of major maintenance or repair expenses we should be aware of?
Yes/ No If "yes," please explain further:



APPENDIX H

Declaration for De-consecration of a Church

From Book of Occasional Services

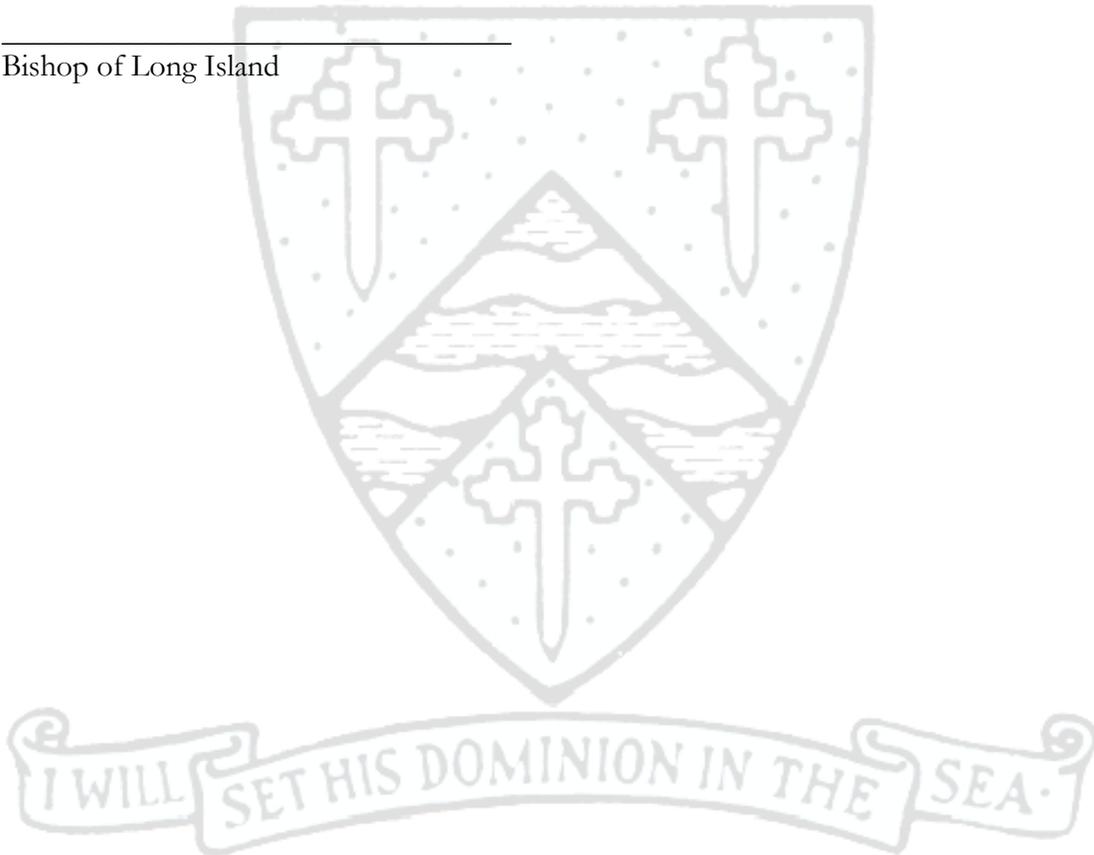
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

I, _____, Bishop of Long Island do hereby revoke the said Sentence of Consecration issued by _____ in the year _____ and do remit this building, and all objects remaining in it, for any lawful and reputable use, according to the laws of this land.

This building, having now been declared deconsecrated and secularized, I declare to be no longer subject to my canonical jurisdiction.

This Declaration, which is to be publicly proclaimed before witnesses gathered at the said building, is given under my hand and seal, in the _____ in the State of New York, and Diocese of Long Island, on this ____ day of August, in the year of our Lord 2013.

Bishop of Long Island



APPENDIX I

Procedural Checklist for Church Closings in the Diocese of Long Island

Parish or Diocesan Council:

- If the Congregation has elected to close, a resolution of at least 2/3 members voting in the affirmative must be submitted to the bishop's office.
- If Canons are being invoked to close a congregation, a resolution must be adapted and voted upon by Diocesan Council acting as Convention in recess.

Bishop's Office:

- Pastoral Transfer of Membership must be arranged for any remaining members on the parish as well as pastoral care for members during the actual closing process.
- Work closely with clergy and lay leaders of the congregation that is closing;
- Set date in Bishop's Calendar for a final liturgy and de-consecration of the church sanctuary.

Standing Committee Consent for deconsecration

Office of Communication:

- Send notice of de-consecration liturgy to ecumenical and faith partners, business community, neighbors, civic groups that may have met in the church property;
- Modify diocesan database shall be changed accordingly;
- Modify national church databases accordingly;
- Respond to questions of the secular press regarding the closure of the church, as needed.

Local Dean:

- Participate in the pastoral care of the members of the congregation that is closing.
- Rally lay and clergy leaders around the closing event, de-consecration liturgy and offer of a home to those members seeking a parish community.
- Work with liturgy coordinator, facilities manager and archivist in a plan for the disposition of elements remaining in the de-consecrated church.

Liturgy Coordinator

- Plan and coordinate de-consecration liturgy;
- Work with local dean, facilities director, and archivist to evaluate and assess liturgical artifacts that remain in the church following the de-consecration.

Trustees of the Estate:

Upon the extinction of a congregation The Trustees of the Estate shall take possession of and administer the property. A decision will be made whether or not to sell the property or to repurpose in some way.

Business/Finance Office:

- All mail including utility bills such as heat, water, and electricity and all other such business mail shall be forwarded to the Diocesan Finance Office at 36 Cathedral Avenue, Garden City, NY 11530.
- All the financial information shall be collected and brought to the Diocesan Finance Office. The finance office will work with officers of closing congregation to transfer accounts to the Trustees of the Diocese and will ensure that any and all bills pertaining to the property are paid in a timely manner.
- Work with the wardens to transfer the insurance coverage from the congregation to the Diocese. Bond insurance should be retained until the books are closed and the bank accounts are closed out.
- Finalize any remaining payments to the clergy-in-charge.

Chancellor:

- Legally dissolve the corporation (assuming the church is incorporated), and representatives of the church shall complete corporate dissolution documents.
- Transfer deeds
- Other legal matters as may be necessary

Facilities:

- Secure the property, making sure that there are arrangements in place for its upkeep (cutting the grass, removal of sign, etc.).
- Coordinate the disposition of elements that remain in the church, working with the archivist, liturgy coordinator and local dean.

Registrar/Archivist

- Gather all congregational records, including Church Register Books of members, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, the parish register, and all vestry
- Appraise which records are required for the formal closing of the congregation and which need to be archived.
- Plan for the proper disposal of records no longer needed.
- Catalogue visual materials such as photographs, videotapes, and films that provide a record of the congregation.
- Develop a list of all records.
- Provide letters of transfer of former congregants and copies of sacramental documents and needed.



APPENDIX J

Resource for a Parish Discerning Closure

This is an Evangelical Lutheran resource so not everything contained here will apply to our Episcopal circumstances. However, it is a very good pastoral and procedural snapshot of the steps a parish will take to close a parish and many thoughtful, creative and helpful hints are contained here.

A Resource for the Closing of Congregations

Prepared by the Congregational Asset Management Task Force of the Lower Susquehanna Synod (Evangelical Lutheran Church)

Preface: Do Not Be Afraid.

This manual is for congregations that are afraid of the future, congregations that are afraid of failure, and congregations that are afraid that they might have to close. The underlying message we want to share is: Do not be afraid. Be strong and courageous. God has led you this far, and God will never forsake you.

We want you to remember that as followers of Jesus Christ, death is nothing for us to fear. Remember that just as a seed has to die in order to bear much fruit, so death and change can lead to abundant life. This can be just as true for the life of a congregation as it is for individuals.

This manual is for congregations that are beginning to acknowledge that they are mortal. It is for congregations that are wondering about their options for the future. It is for congregations that are wondering if they are sustainable for mission and ministry, and are wondering what the next steps should be. This manual will not give you all the answers. But our hope is that it will help you to begin asking the right questions.

This manual was written by a task force of pastors and lay leaders from within the Lower Susquehanna Synod, all of whom have had experience working with congregations in crisis and transition. We have some familiarity with the practical, legal, financial, pastoral, and spiritual aspects of church closures.

Our purpose is not to close congregations. Rather, we want to help congregations that have acknowledged their mortality to think through their options, and to understand that in some situations, closure can be a faithful and life-giving decision. The purpose of this manual is to offer encouragement for congregations that are wondering about their continued sustainable, and to provide practical guidance to congregations that are considering closure. God's promise to Joshua as he faced an unknown future is still God's promise to us: "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

"O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through joys and perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." (*adapted from the Service of Evening Prayer, Evangelical Lutheran Worship*).

Chapter 1: The End of an Era is not the End of the Story. God is Faithful. Joshua and the promised land.

Israel had become a great nation while in Egyptian captivity; then God called Moses to lead them out of Egypt into the promised land of Canaan. Moses led the people through the wilderness for forty years. He led them to capture the land east of the Jordan. Then Moses died in sight of the promised land.

How could God allow this to happen? Why didn't God raise Moses from the dead? Moses had been the loyal leader of God's people for forty years, and now, at the time of their deliverance, he was dead. The people of Israel were filled with fear and anxiety.

Joshua, who had served as Moses' personal minister for years, was confused and caught in an extremely difficult situation. If Joshua was expecting consolation and sympathy from God, he was mistaken. God's response to Joshua was: Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land that I am about to give them—to the Israelites" (Josh. 1:2).

God was proclaiming the end of an era, but also the continuation of the promise he had made to Moses, the same promise of a place and a people that he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God's brutal honesty with Joshua can be a lesson for us today. God's people have always had great responsibilities. We do not have the same challenges or charge that God gave Joshua. But we do have a charge from God, and we will face challenges. Like the people of Israel, we can also get discouraged and fearful, thinking that we cannot succeed. Nothing should be of greater encouragement, when we face these responsibilities, than the assurance that God will help us accomplish them.

If you are part of a congregation that is fearful and anxious about the future of your church, consider the story of Joshua on the verge of the promised land. Can you be honest about the realities of your congregation? If considering your church's future causes you to mourn about its possible lost future, can you celebrate and mourn at the same time? Could God be proclaiming the end of one era, but also continuing his promise in a new way? The lessons Joshua received from God about tough times can be relevant for us today.

Having received instructions and encouragement from the Lord, Joshua began to prepare to cross the Jordan into Canaan. He commanded the officers to instruct the people in the camp to prepare provisions and be ready in three days to cross the Jordan and go into the promised land. Joshua told his people to get prepared and be ready to move forward. These lessons can apply to us as we examine the health and viability of our own congregations.

The temptations of the "good old days".

"The good old days!" How we humans long for the "good old days", even though we know that they will never return, and that maybe they weren't really all that good anyway. In our churches, we also reminisce about how wonderful it used to be back in the "good old days". It is understandable that we would want to return to a more secure past. If only we could develop a new program, start a better Christian Education program, or call a more enthusiastic pastor, then maybe everything would be better. Many of us would rather long for the "good old days" than face difficult realities in the present.

God told Joshua, “Don’t live in the past. Prepare for the future. Move on.” God wanted the Israelites to look forward, not back. He also wants us to look forward, not back. He wants us to prepare for the future that we cannot see.

After the Israelites crossed the Jordan, eventually Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem. It didn’t last long, however. A conquering army destroyed the temple and took many Israelites into captivity. Generations later, returning Israelites began the process of rebuilding their lives, their city, and their temple. As the new temple was being built, those who remembered the glory of Solomon’s temple wept. They wept because they felt that the new temple could never compare to Solomon’s temple. They wept, not realizing that their longing for the past had shaken their faith in the power of God and his ability to shape a new and glorious future.

We may also weep as we long for our past. The dream of reliving the “good old days” by returning to a period of growth and glory is strong in many of our congregations. Again, this is understandable, for God has done wonderful things through our congregations. Faith has been nurtured and mission has been accomplished through the life of our congregations. But the reality may be that God is telling us, just as he told the Israelites: “Don’t look back at the way things were, but look forward to see what I will do”.

Be strong and courageous, for God is with you.

God instructed Joshua what to do and how to do it. He told him to observe the law as revealed to Moses, to study it diligently, and obey it. It is much easier to be brave when you have received proper guidance and instruction. We often speak of people who act out of the “courage of their convictions”. It is hard to act courageously when we’re not sure what is the right thing to do.

When we face the reality that our congregation may be in crisis, we may feel overwhelmed with guilt. When we face the possibility of ending and closure, we may begin to ask ourselves: What did we do wrong? Were we not faithful enough? Will a new building program or a new pastor return us to the “good old days”? But as we ask these questions, also consider: Was God’s plan for the Israelites completed once Moses died? Or was God preparing for a new era, a different beginning?

God said to Joshua, “I will give you every place where you set your feet, as I promised Moses” (Joshua 1:3). God promised that he would be with Joshua, just as he had been with Moses. He would not leave or forsake him. As with Joshua, we too need encouragement and assurance that we can succeed in God’s work.

In struggling with the reality of your church, could it be that God has accomplished everything he intended through your particular congregation? Could God be telling you that your work is done, and that a new ministry is being formed? Remember, congregations were not meant to last forever. The kingdom of God is forever, but individual churches are not. We are here because of the legacy of congregations that have come before us. Perhaps, God is telling us to pass that legacy forward in a new fashion, a new form, a new ministry. God’s plan will not be stopped by closing the doors of a church building! As God said to Joshua, “Don’t live in the past. Prepare for the future. Move on.”

Preparing for the future and moving on may mean letting go! Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). These words should remind us that preparing for the future may be difficult. Remember that the Church has faced tough times throughout its history. In the life of a church, no issue can be tougher than considering the end of an era. Will this experience cause pain, anxiety, confusion, and doubt? Yes. Will you become discouraged and fearful, thinking that you cannot succeed? Possibly. But as you travel through this process, remember to celebrate all that God has accomplished through your ministry. And remember that, as with Joshua, God will never forsake you.

As with Joshua, we need encouragement and assurance that we can succeed in God’s work. God has given us all that we need to be successful in serving him. As the psalmist writes, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear” (Psalm 46:1-2).

If your church is at the threshold of closure, you are not alone. The future is not without hope. God still has a plan and a purpose for you. The kingdom will prevail. Keep in mind that the decision to close a congregation can be a faithful and life-giving choice. God’s goal for Joshua was to lead the people into the land of Canaan. Joshua was filled with fear and anxiety with this goal. However, God promised Joshua that he would be with him. With hope and the promise of God’s presence, Joshua was able to be strong and courageous.

What is God’s goal for you and your congregation? We can face the tough times of our unknown future knowing that God has offered us the promised land of eternal life, and he has assured us that we can successfully reach it. This alone should make us strong and brave enough to face our future together. “The kingdom’s ours forever”.

Chapter 2: The Life Cycle of a Congregation. Thoughts on Life, Death and Dying, and Leaving a Legacy for the Future

The life cycle of a congregation.

God’s kingdom lasts forever, but individual congregations do not. Congregations come into being, live, and eventually, die. This is normal. The stages in the congregational life cycle are birth, growth, mature flourishing, plateau, decline, and dying. (For helpful descriptions of each stage, see Chapter Five of **Legacy Churches** and “Assessing Congregational Viability” in **Ending with Hope**; see permission credits on p. 30).

Times of crisis and transition can provide good opportunities for a congregation to return to the basic questions: What is God calling us to do, at this particular time and place? What is our purpose? Why are we here?

The danger is that it is tempting to avoid wrestling with these questions until it is almost too late. It is better to ask these questions when a congregation is in the flourishing, plateau, or even in the early declining stages of the life cycle. By the time a congregation is actually moving into its death throes, people may be too scared and worn out to do the hard work of corporate discernment. By that time, financial and material resources may also be scarce or worn out.

Therefore it is smart to be proactive about starting this conversation **before** a congregation is moribund. This is just good common sense. It is also better stewardship. The discernment process about a congregation's future (including any ensuing process of transformation or closure) takes a lot of time and energy. Any options such as merger, consolidation, relocation, or closure will also involve significant legal and constitutional work. All this takes time, people, and money. It is wise to plan ahead.

This is analogous to the individual life cycle. We all know that it is wise to acknowledge your own mortality and make plans while you're still reasonably healthy. It is much more difficult to make good end of life decisions and do effective estate planning when you're already enfeebled, exhausted, and have already used up your resources. The problem (with individuals and with congregations) is that we often choose to live in denial of the fact that we are mortal.

Prayer is crucial. Sustained prayer and conversation about the congregation's mission can lead to new directions for ministry and a new sense of focus and purpose. Sometimes, such prayer and conversation help a congregation to identify assets and resources it didn't realize it had, so that ministry in that place can continue for a time in new ways. Here, options such as yoked ministry, cooperative ministry, relocation, and consolidation are worth careful consideration. Depending on the situation, these options may be viable strategies for renewed mission, or they may just postpone inevitable decline.

Sometimes, sustained prayer and conversation about mission leads to the realization that God is calling a congregation to close. 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. There are times when dying may be a more faithful response to God's call than stubborn survival.

Death and dying.

For Christians, dying is okay. Remember how Jesus taught that a seed must die in order to bear much fruit. We lose our life in order to gain it. This is true for individual Christians, but is also true for congregations. If a congregation is clinging to survival for its own sake, and not for the sake of Christ and his mission, then something is amiss.

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 timeline, 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.

Good communication is important at any time. In a time of crisis, change and loss, communication is extra 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. 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. Every thing 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.

Leaving a legacy.

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. Just as an individual should plan ahead, so a congregation nearing the end of its life cycle can plan ahead how to use its resources to continue serving God and neighbor in faithful witness. Use the following questions and issues as starting points for your discernment:

- What are the congregation’s assets? Look at financial assets, buildings and land, but also consider knowledge, experience, passions, imagination, and spiritual gifts.
- 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 of camping ministry...)
- Can congregational furnishings and other property be sold, gifted, or re-purposed in ways so that ministry can continue?
- Identify objects and documents 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.

Chapter 3: The Discernment Process: What is God Calling our Congregation to Do? Helping a Congregation Make Decisions about its Sustainability

Through this exercise we want to help a congregation to make the proper decision to close or not to close, centered around the question: “What is God calling this congregation to do?” That is the core question of ministry.

Individual congregations like individuals — Moses, Joshua, you and me — are not immortal. The closure of a congregation does not signify failure. A congregation like an individual is born, grows, may get sick, can recover, will age and will eventually die. The churches of the First Century in the Book of Acts are no longer existing, but their legacy lives on in the churches today.

God was not downplaying the significance of Moses leadership with the Hebrew people when God turned to Joshua to push forward when Moses died. God asked Joshua to do the work that needed to be done. Past history and events should be considered a blessing and be celebrated, but time moves on and so must our ways of accomplishing ministry. Look forward and see what God can do.

Every local congregation can trace its lineage to the churches of Acts. However, churches were not meant to last forever. Closing the doors does not stop the plan of God. His plan moves forward even when there are apparent problems in a church. God can use the seed found within a closing church to produce more fruit and enable one's church to provide an eternal legacy.

A decision to close a congregation is not easy. Emotions run high, and a sense of failure may pervade the hearts and minds of those remaining. The question before us is — **“Is this congregation sustainable?”** The main issue is — **Can we make meaningful the Gospel of Jesus Christ?** It takes **money and people** to do ministry in our culture.

We live in a culture of bigness — big malls; huge parking lots; massive theaters; enormous office buildings. That is the mindset of people in our culture, and many people will bring that mindset with them when they visit a congregation.

Smaller congregations struggle because they have limited people and limited resources from which they can provide ministry. Often when a congregation is in a fight for survival, it may lose its sense of vision and mission. A congregation needs enough attendance to make itself look, feel and sound alive. A good worship environment is at least 50 adults gathered together. Visitors probably will not return if the church is perceived as dying.

So we can panic or we can plan. We are called to be Kingdom Builders. A congregation that closes can be the beginning of something greater with the purposeful planting of new ministries that spread the good news of Christ.

The starting point for our discernment of viability should always begin with prayer. Then study the congregation's constitution concerning its mission. Discuss:

1. How is this congregation living out its stated mission? 2. What barriers exist that hinder the fulfillment of its mission? 3. Can the congregation overcome these barriers?

Chapter 5: Making Closure, Ending in Hope

In the multi-step process of closing, your 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, your 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 your congregation may want to consider as you together plan for the final gathering and service. We have also included a *Service of Leave-Taking* for use when a congregation is leaving a church-building that has served its mission, or for when a congregation is closing.

Steps to consider when planning the final service:

1. 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. Sharing one last meal in the beloved kitchen, using the space of the building that your congregation is leaving, is a testament to your shared spiritual life together in this place.
2. Invite current and former members.
3. Invite the community. This service is their chance to say farewell and Godspeed to your congregation and its witness in the community.
4. Invite the recipients of the church's assets. This can be a public way to show continuity of God's work between your congregation and the recipients of your abundance. Share this information during the service.
5. Invite other congregations. Especially invite a congregation you may be merging with, or a congregation that has been identified as the primary congregation your members will be joining. This can be a powerful testament to the mutual ministry you share in Christ.
6. Plan the service with care and attention. Be intentional about the final procession, where items commonly used in the congregation's worship life are carried out of the building for the last time. Plan who will carry these items and what the person carrying them is to do with them at the end of the procession. You may also wish to incorporate the church's mission statement in a part of the liturgy. See the notes on the service below.
7. Invite the synod worship committee or synod staff worship relator to be a part of the planning process of your final service. They may be able to provide additional resources, vessels, etc. as needed.

