

# Liturgy for Closed Churches

## Annual Conference 2017 Cabinet Report

### HYMN

“O God, Our Help in Ages Past” (verses 1-3)

1. O God, our help in ages past,  
our hope for years to come,  
our shelter from the stormy blast,  
and our eternal home.
2. Under the shadow of thy throne,  
still may we dwell secure;  
sufficient is thine arm alone,  
and our defense is sure.
3. Before the hills in order stood,  
or earth received her frame,  
from everlasting, thou art God,  
to endless years the same.

### INTRODUCTION

Rev. Amy Wagner

In John 12:24, Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Today, we honor congregations who have served their communities faithfully as followers of Jesus, and who have reached the point of death, so that the fruit of the gospel may continue to grow.

Closure can be a faithful choice for communities of faith. We praise God and celebrate the ministries of local churches that have been discontinued in the last year, leaving behind rich legacies of faith.

### NAMING OF LOCAL CHURCHES

Rev. Joel Garrett

As we name the congregations who have closed in the past year, persons who have been nurtured by each place of worship are invited to stand in thanksgiving and remembrance.

### LITANY OF THANKSGIVING

Rev. Paul Taylor

For the Word of God proclaimed in sacred sanctuaries,  
**We give you thanks, O God.**

For generations who have prayed their prayers and sung your praises,  
**We give you thanks, O God.**

For lives introduced to God's grace at baptismal fonts,  
**We give you thanks, O God.**

For tables where the Lord's Supper and potluck suppers have been shared,  
**We give you thanks, O God.**

For altar rails where we have  
Confirmed our youth,  
Knelt in confession,  
Professed our faith,  
Vowed our love, and  
Mourned our dead  
**We give you thanks, O God.**

For the many who moved beyond church walls to serve God and our neighbors,  
**We give you thanks, O God.**

As we release these congregations into your keeping and care,  
**we give you thanks, O God.**

For all this, O God, we give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

#### **DECLARATION OF CLOSING**

Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi

We now declare these congregations, having been chartered and named as United Methodist Churches, to be disbanded. They have been God's gift for a season, and we are thankful for the ways they have served the mission given the Church by Jesus Christ.

We now release their buildings, property and assets to bless others. We commend their members to other congregations, knowing we all remain part of the Body of Christ together.

Giving thanks for their legacy of faith, we pledge to continue the work of ministry in Western Pennsylvania, so that the word of God may be proclaimed, the sacraments administered, persons nurtured as disciples of Jesus Christ, and communities transformed by the love of God.

#### **PRAYER OF COMMITMENT**

Rev. Pat Nelson

O God, as in the past you have blessed

the ministry carried on by these congregations;  
so, now and in the years to come,  
we pray that you may greatly bless us to continue the work of ministry.

As your Spirit has always been present  
in the neighborhoods of Western Pennsylvania,  
we pray that people will continue to seek and find you in these towns and cities.

As disciples of the risen Lord,  
may we remain one in Christ, one with each other,  
and one in ministry to all the world,  
until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. **Amen.**

#### HYMN

“O God, Our Help in Ages Past” (verses 4-6)

4. A thousand ages, in thy sight,  
are like an evening gone;  
short as the watch that ends the night,  
before the rising sun.

5. Time, like an ever rolling stream,  
bears all who breathe away;  
they fly forgotten, as a dream  
dies at the opening day.

6. O God, our help in ages past,  
our hope for years to come;  
be thou our guide while life shall last,  
and our eternal home.

(Liturgy adapted from “An Order for the Leave–Taking of a Church Building and An Order for Disbanding a Congregation” Copyright © 1992 UMPH)