

Retired Clergy Appreciation Liturgies
Written for Preachers' Aid Society of New England
By Rev. Kerry Greenhill © 2018

Retired Clergy Sunday - Every local church in the New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is invited to celebrate Retired Clergy Sunday on a Sunday of their choosing. It is an opportunity to celebrate the pastors who have served and nurtured our communities. Consider joining your brother and sister churches in New England by honoring our retired clergy with a special collection and gift to the Preachers' Aid Society of New England.

Themes that tie in well with a recognition and celebration of retired clergy:

- Calling and vocation, to ordained and lay ministries
- Spiritual gifts and building up the Body of Christ
- The saints who have gone before us (living and dead); our ancestors in the faith
- The purpose of the church: making disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world
- The nature of spiritual leadership and authority
- Mentors, teachers, and elders who have nurtured us and helped us grow spiritually
- Faithfulness and humble service as the way of Christ

Suggested Scriptures:

“Well done, good and faithful servant.” – Matthew 25:23 (NIV)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” – Hebrews 1:1-2a

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” – 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.” – Romans 12:4-7

“And he said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’ – Matthew 13:52

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” – Revelation 1:8 (see also Revelation 21:6 and 22:13)

“Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking...

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written,

‘The one who had much did not have too much,
and the one who had little did not have too little.’” – 2 Corinthians 8:7, 13-15

Mentors and Elders:

- Moses and Joshua (Numbers 27:12-23, Deuteronomy 31:7-8, Joshua 1:1-9)
- Eli with Samuel (1 Samuel 3)
- Elijah with Elisha (2 Kings 2)
- Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:21-38)

Suggested Hymns:

United Methodist Hymnal

57 O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing
 338 Where He Leads Me
 344 Tú Has Venido a la Orilla (Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore)
 354 I Surrender All
 356 Pues Si Vivimos (When We Are Living)
 383 This Is a Day of New Beginnings
 393 Spirit of the Living God
 399 Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated
 413 A Charge to Keep I Have
 415 Take Up Thy Cross
 432 Jesu, Jesu
 436 The Voice of God Is Calling
 463 Lord, Speak to Me
 464 I Will Trust in the Lord
 473 Lead Me, Lord
 530 Are Ye Able
 547 O Church of God, United
 548 In Christ There Is No East or West
 553 And Are We Yet Alive
 555 Forward Through the Ages
 557 Blest Be the Tie That Binds
 558 We Are the Church
 571 Go, Make of All Disciples

577 God of Grace and God of Glory
 578 God of Love and God of Power
 583 You Are the Seed (Sois la Semilla)
 593 Here I Am, Lord
 620 One Bread, One Body
 664 Sent Forth by God’s Blessing
 670 Go Forth for God
 712 I Sing a Song of the Saints of God

The Faith We Sing

2032 My Life Is in You, Lord
 2051 I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry
 2129 I Have Decided to Follow Jesus
 2130 The Summons
 2137 Would I Have Answered When You Called
 2150 Lord, Be Glorified
 2153 I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me
 2163 He Who Began a Good Work in You
 2171 Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
 2172 We Are Called
 2175 Together We Serve
 2176 Make Me a Servant
 2184 Sent Out in Jesus’ Name
 2186 Song of Hope
 2190 Bring Forth the Kingdom

- 2193 Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying
- 2208 Guide My Feet
- 2214 Lead Me, Guide Me
- 2221 In Unity We Lift Our Song
- 2222 Servant Song
- 2236 Gather Us In
- 2237 As a Fire Is Meant for Burning
- 2238 In the Midst of New Dimensions
- 2239 Go Ye, Go Ye into the World
- 2241 The Spirit sends Us Forth to Serve
- 2242 Walk with Me
- 2243 We All Are One in Mission
- 2245 Within the Day-to-Day

Worship & Song

- 3025 God Is Speaking
- 3030 Eternal God Transcending Time
- 3073 We Walk His Way
- 3115 Covenant Prayer
- 3116 Love the Lord
- 3117 Rule of Life
- 3119 Take, O Take Me As I Am
- 3128 Whatever You Do
- 3148 There's a Spirit of Love in This Place
- 3149 A Place at the Table
- 3152 Welcome
- 3158 Go to the World
- 3160 We Will Follow

1. Call to Worship

One: Come, people of God – come and worship your Creator!

**Many: We come, thankful for the gifts of Creation
and for who we are created to be.**

One: Come, people of God – sing the songs and tell the stories of your ancestors!

**Many: We come, thankful for the generations who came before us
and the traditions they handed down.**

One: Come, people of God – dream of the new world that is now being born!

**Many: We come, thankful for the dreams and visions of the Kin'dom
proclaimed by prophets of all ages.**

One: Come, people of God – pray for the church and the world!

**Many: We come, thankful for the gift of prayer
that connects us with the saints of every time and place.**

One: Come, people of God – celebrate all that God is doing in your midst!

**Many: We come, thankful and rejoicing, praying and singing,
dreaming and lamenting, grieving and embracing,
to celebrate the gifts of God here among the people of God.
Amen.**

2. Invocation or Collect

Eternal God, throughout the ages you sent prophets and judges, rulers and teachers of all kinds to guide your people in the ways of integrity, justice, compassion, and love. We thank you for the shepherds and saints in our midst and beyond who have ministered faithfully in your name, and pray that like them, we would clearly see your image reflected in each person, and serve Christ in our neighbors, friends, strangers, and enemies. Amen.

3. Pastoral Prayer

Holy One, you are Alpha and Omega, beginning and end,
beyond time and space
yet present in each moment and every place where we are.

We give you thanks today
for all the ways you have revealed your Word, your will,
your image, your nature,
to your people throughout the ages.

We thank you especially for those who have answered your call
to preach good news to the poor and the poor in spirit,
to proclaim the gospel of healing and liberation
through words and actions, attitudes and relationships.

We celebrate and remember all those who have served as elders,
as pastors and shepherds to your people,
both in this community and throughout our connectional church:
[retired elders' names may be shared here]

And we celebrate those who have served
as deacons, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers,
living out a calling to compassion and justice through words and service:
[names of retired deacons, deaconesses, diaconal ministers].

For all the ways they have embodied your calling and modeled the path of discipleship,
we give thanks and praise.

For their current needs in body and soul,
we ask your peace, your strength, your healing power.

For the courage and grace to live out what they have taught us,
and to become more clearly the Body of Christ, reflecting your image,
we pray for a new outpouring of your Holy Spirit for ourselves and for your whole Church.

May their compassion for the vulnerable become our compassion;
may their joy in the gospel become our joy;
may their endurance in the face of adversity become our ability to endure;
so that we may carry on their legacy
and continue to bear witness to your love in Jesus Christ.

It is in his name and spirit
that we pray the prayer that he taught his followers, saying...

[The Lord's Prayer]

4. Invitation to Offering and Prayer of Dedication

Every good gift has its original source in God. Yet so many of our blessings and privileges come to us through the work of other people: through the sacrifices and generosity of ancestors, of community members, of spiritual leaders, of all who give their lives to service in one form or another. Today, we have the chance to pass on the gifts we have received, by contributing to a special collection for the Preachers' Aid Society, which supports active and retired clergy, and their families. In honor of those who have given before us, let us give from what we have so that others – who have sacrificed a great deal for the gospel and Christ's Church – will have enough.

Let us pray.

Gracious and generous God, we come to you with hearts full to overflowing with all we have received. And so we offer back to you a portion of our lives and our resources, and ask that you would bless them to your purposes. May these gifts especially bring blessings to your faithful servants, active and retired clergy who are in need, and their families. In the name of Jesus Christ, whom we serve and follow. Amen.

5. Litany of Gratitude

This litany may be adapted as needed to suit the needs of the occasion and congregation. You could insert the names of pastors who have served the congregation, or retired clergy who have some connection with the community, or saints who have gone on to God's promise but whose legacy remains meaningful.

God of wisdom and providential care,
we give you thanks for all who have answered the call
to shepherd your people in this place:

For the native people of this area...

who communed with you long before Europeans arrived,

Well done, good and faithful servants.

For the earliest missionaries and circuit riders,

who sought to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ,

even as they may have made mistakes and fallen short of your purposes...

Well done, good and faithful servants.

For the founding pastor of this congregation,

and all who responded to the call to draw close to you here...

Well done, good and faithful servants.

For those who had the vision to see what was needed,

and who put in the work to build up this church over the years...

Well done, good and faithful servants.

For those who proclaimed your desire for mercy and justice,

in this community and around the world,

calling your people to repentance and transformed lives...

Well done, good and faithful servants.

For the ministers who have taught and formed each of us gathered here,

in our childhood years and throughout our lives...

Well done, good and faithful servants.

For those who have served among us in living memory,

and those who affiliate with us today in their retired capacity...

Well done, good and faithful servants.

Enduring and faithful God, we give you thanks for all these your servants,
the clergy who have answered your call and given their lives to your work.

Bless them in their retirement with rest when they are weary;

openness to new ways of engaging with your Spirit;

wisdom to share with those following in their footsteps

and humility to do so gently and without judgment;

and energy to continue to respond to Christ's commandment

to love you with all of who we are,

and to love others as we love ourselves.

Amen.

6. Communion Liturgy

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We come before you, God of our ancestors,
with joy and deep gratitude for this earth that you made
and for humankind in all its wondrous diversity.
For the gifts of the earth and the gifts of relationship,
and all who have helped us learn how to be good stewards of both,
we thank you, Generous One.
For all the times your prophets have comforted the afflicted
and afflicted the comfortable
in order to move humankind toward greater justice and liberation,
we thank you, Compassionate One.
For the covenants you invite us into and keep
even when we fall short or turn away,
we thank you, Faithful One.

And so, with your people on earth
and all the company of heaven
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest!**

Holy are you, and blessed is your Beloved Child, Jesus Christ.
He knew that he came from your love,
was created and called to love,
and would return to your abundant love,
and so he dedicated his life
to the way of extravagant, self-giving love for all people.
He healed those who were sick, welcomed outcasts, fed the hungry,
affirmed women and foreigners, challenged the powerful,
and invited everyone to experience
the disruptive goodness of God's emerging Kin'dom.

He called many to follow him
and appointed some, called apostles,
for set-apart servant leadership
modeled after his own ministry.

On the night in which the power of his love
came face to face with the world's love of power,
he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,
gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
When I am gone, the memories of all I have taught you
and all we have experienced together
may start to fade.
When that happens, gather together again
and do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Drink from this, all of you;
this is my blood, a sign of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for countless others,
for the forgiveness of sins, healing of wounds,
liberation from captivity, and empowerment of the lowly.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me."

And so,
as we remember how you worked through Jesus
to draw the world closer to you in love and justice,
wholeness and right relationship,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on all of us gathered here,
along with those who are with us in their hearts or in ours,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed and made whole by his love.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
reflecting his humble service as a loving shepherd
for all who are lost, lonely, lowly, or left out.

Through your Son Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy church,
all honor and glory is yours, almighty God,
now and forever.

Amen.

7. Blessing or Sending Prayer

As you go from here, may you know your own belovedness in God's sight,
and the path to which you are called in this world.

May you recognize the legacy of those who have gone before you,
and leave gifts for those who will follow you as well.

And may the God who has called shepherds and prophets and teachers in every age,
and Jesus Christ who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,

and the Holy Spirit that pours out diverse gifts to build up the church,
bless you this day and each day

as you work for the Kin'dom of God to come on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.