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Making and publishing a liturgy: The Farewelling of a Home

Jane Simpson



Jane Simpson is an historian and award-winning poet based in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. She has Anglican roots and ecumenical sympathies. She has taught social history and religious studies in universities in Australia and New Zealand and her work has been published in books and international journals. She has two poetry collections, *A world without maps* (2016) and *Tuning Wordsworth's Piano* (2019). A CD of her hymns and songs, *Tussocks Dancing*, was released in 2002. In writing liturgy, she draws on the rich bicultural heritage of the Anglican Church in her country and its Prayer Book, used throughout the world.

On an unlikely pilgrimage, cycling round the remote Catlins coast of the South Island, I started to write a new kind of liturgy. My article for the *Australian Journal of Liturgy*, 'Farewelling a Home: the difference an earthquake makes,' was in its fourth draft. Back home in Christchurch, liturgies collected for the literature review covered the studio floor: itineraries of medieval monks, rites of deconsecration and services marking the end of a marriage. From these I had gleaned prayers for a liturgy I argued needed to be written and a collection of prayers for householders to use to farewell their homes.

This summer cycling holiday was different. I was returning the poems in my latest collection, *Tuning Wordsworth's Piano*, to the place they came from, Kākā Point, home to the acclaimed Māori poet, Hone Tuwhare (1922–2008). His whānau had no idea I was coming. On the first leg, cycling from Invercargill to Fortrose, I settled into a meditative silence. It was a bitterly cold day, hemmed in by low cloud. The idea of producing a book of other people's prayers was not working. I looked up from the road. Light was streaming onto a distant hillock. It was perfectly formed and covered in vibrant colours. In that instant there was an inner illumination: I had to write the liturgy from scratch. From this moment I never doubted my ability to undertake and complete the task. The next day the sun rose an apocalyptic red. I smelt smoke, smoke from the Australian bushfires. Thousands of homes had been destroyed. I returned to Christchurch with a sense of urgency.

I wrote the liturgy, 'The Farewelling of a Home', in response to a need, an extreme need. Eight years earlier, on 22 February 2011, a devastating earthquake had struck Christchurch and its surrounding districts. In the city of 400,000 people, 100,000 homes were damaged or completely destroyed and 185 lives were lost. Whole suburbs were covered in liquefaction. Women in the eastern suburbs, who had lost their homes and who knew I was a poet, asked me to help them express their grief and say goodbye. They wanted to go to the site, acknowledge their loss and to grieve, if possible, to go through the rooms and evoke memories, and to affirm together hope in the future.

I never forgot those women or the abandoned suburbs they came from. As the city was rebuilt, the reasons for leaving a home for the last time changed but not the importance of marking it. If I were to write a liturgy, it would be part of a living tradition, of the rich bicultural heritage of our Anglican Church as expressed in *A New Zealand Prayer Book = He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* (1989). It has two pastoral liturgies to do with the home: 'The Takahi Whare', prayers in a house after death, and 'The Blessing of a Home'. Both as a church historian and as a poet, I wanted to dig deeper into their origins and analyse their development. I sought out the Rt. Rev. Brian Carrell, a member of the New Zealand Prayer Book Commission for 34 years from 1965. Dr Angela McCarthy, indefatigable editor of the *AJL*, published my articles on the Takahi Whare (2016) and the Blessing of a Home (2018) and jumped at the idea of a third article on the need for a rite to farewell one.

The earthquake had jogged a memory of producing a liturgy to farewell my childhood home. In retirement my parents wanted a smaller and newer house. Our home of 42 years since arriving from the UK would almost certainly be demolished to make way for new townhouses. I had to do something. I adapted 'The Blessing of a Home' in *ANZPB*, wrote new prayers and led the service, becoming a priest to my Roman Catholic parents. The house was almost completely empty, so spoke of finality. Special objects placed in each room sparked memories as we prayed and provided a sense of continuity in my parents' new home.

Few established poets write prayers; even fewer write liturgies. Conversely, very few writers of liturgy are established poets. My poetry came after many years' writing as an academic historian. The poems in my chapbook, *Candlewick Kelp* (2000), create unusual images and juxtapositions. They employ sound and word play so the poems sing. The hymns and songs in my CD, *Tussocks Dancing* (2002), use concrete imagery rather than the abstract nouns of some contemporary hymnody. My first full length collection, *A world without maps* (Brisbane: Interactive Press, 2016), drew on my time teaching English to Muslim women in a desert school in Abu Dhabi. *Tuning Wordsworth's Piano* has unashamedly theological and feminist poems.

A single phrase from one of my students, a Filipina factory worker, was the key that unlocked the liturgy. Gloria lived in the eastern suburbs and worked on the other side of town. I taught her English under the government-funded Workplace Literacy Scheme. During the first lesson after the quake she vividly described the shaking and having to dive under her worktable. Her boss rang the next day and insisted she go to work. She responded: 'Sir, my house is broken.' This is the unconscious poetry of young children and of people who speak English as a second language. Her simple response to an unreasonable employer became my lament for a broken city: 'O God who weeps / our house is broken / our hearts are broken / our home is no more' (p.7).

Drawing on Arnold van Gennepe's three-fold structure for 'rites of passage', my liturgy has five parts: Gather, Acknowledging Loss (Lament), Giving Thanks for the Past, Taking Leave and The Blessing and Sending Out. As in my poetry books, I juxtaposed very different styles of writing. This is less likely to happen if a committee is writing a liturgy. A beautiful collect by our then Assistant Priest at the Transitional Cathedral, the Rev. Ben Randall, follows the lament in a child's voice. The Rt. Rev. Brian Carrell wrote responses for the litany through the rooms, which were translated into te reo Māori. Rubrics were written for farewelling a home that couldn't be entered after a natural disaster.

Since 'The Farewelling of a Home' was a new kind of liturgy, I wanted full critical scrutiny. Although the *AJL* seldom published whole liturgies, Dr Angela McCarthy sent both the article and liturgy off to the reviewers. They did not question images of God as Wisdom and Mother. More responses in te reo Māori were suggested. To my delight, the article and liturgy were published together in the May 2020 issue. The Editorial Board of the Australian Academy of Liturgy gave permission for the liturgy to be published as a book. With practically no capital, I set up my press, Poiema Liturgies, with its website www.poiema.co.nz.

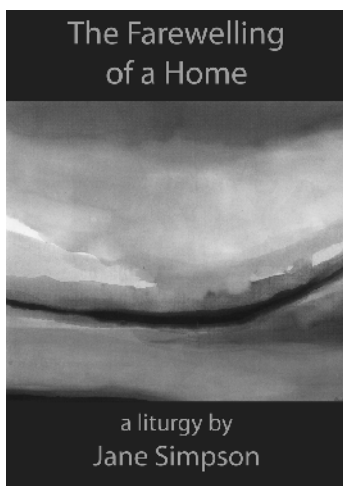
The book has a foreword by the eminent Anglican liturgist, the Rt. Rev. George Connor. Copyright Licensing New Zealand advised me to put the copyright details in the footer of every page to reduce the chances of my work being used without permission. Suggestions for adapting the liturgy are given in notes. Six new prayers were added, the first for moving into a retirement village. Leading New Zealand abstract painter, Gretchen Albrecht, gave her permission to use her wonderful painting, *Golden Vapour Cloud* (1973), on the cover. It draws people into a meditative silence. Starting with this book, the intention is to publish more liturgies, crafted through poetry.

Even more than poetry, liturgy lives on the breath. It is primarily an oral text. It has to be used. *The Farewelling of a Home* was used for the first time on Easter Monday 2021 by a Māori Anglican priest. The Rev. Rawinia Douglas and her husband were

leaving Christchurch to return to the place she had grown up, near Gisborne. I close with Rawinia's words: 'After the launch Jane's beautiful liturgy was swirling around in my mind. I felt the service was lovely and done in a relaxed fashion. All six of us in the group had a part. I feel we six are all pioneers in our use of such a brilliant liturgy for the first time of many thousand more times to come all around the world! All the praise and thanks to God!'

The Farewelling of a Home

by award-winning poet, Jane Simpson



Cover image: Gretchen Albrecht, *Golden Vapour Cloud*, 1973

'In The Farewelling of a Home, Jane has given us fresh texts and deep theological understanding which can move us from tragedy to wholeness and offers a model for liturgical provisions to meet new such occasions.'

– Emeritus Professor Robert Gribben, AM,
(Melbourne, Australia)

'This liturgy is very fine indeed. It will find its way into many places on a variety of occasions. It fills a large gap in the feminine half of creation. The writing is beautiful.'

– Joy Cowley, ONZ, DCNZM

From the Foreword by the Rt. Rev. George Connor

'The liturgy is easily accessible to those who have no experience of formal worship.'

- for leaving a home of many memories
- when moving into a retirement village
- for personal prayer and reflection
- as a gift for someone about to move house

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