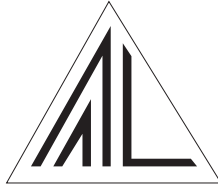




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Farewelling a home: The difference an earthquake makes

Jane Simpson



Jane Simpson is an independent religious historian, editor and poet based in Christchurch, New Zealand. She has taught social history, religious studies and academic writing in universities in Australia and New Zealand, and has articles in international journals and chapters in books. Her first poetry collection, *A world without maps* (2016), drew on her time teaching English to Muslim women teachers in a desert school in Abu Dhabi. Her second collection, *Tuning Wordsworth's Piano*, was published in 2019. Since then, she has started to write liturgy.

ABSTRACT

Very few people have an act of worship when leaving their home for the last time. After the immensely destructive Christchurch earthquake of 2011, many householders asked clergy for a service to farewell their homes and express their sense of loss and grief, yet none existed. A review of the literature establishes the absence of a rite in liturgy books but finds in biography and poetry evidence of highly personal practices and rituals of farewell. This article argues that reinterpretations of van Gennepe's schema of rites of passage provide the flexible framework required to write a liturgy of farewelling a home. Traditional and innovative rites of endings are critically examined in order to identify prayers and ritual actions which could be adapted to farewell a home in two main contexts: at key points of transition in a family's life and after a natural disaster. Comparative textual analysis of deconsecration and taking leave shows the importance of lament in farewelling a building. Services that conceptualise heaven as one's 'true home' are seen as gnostic, rather than Christian. The world-embracing theology of 'The Blessing of a Home' (1989) informs the liturgy that follows.

Closing the door of your home for the last time is something few of us can imagine. It may follow days of frenetic packing. Afterwards, a quick looking back. In natural disasters and wartime people may have to flee with their lives or salvage what they can from among the remains, carrying them out in their arms. Australians are all too familiar with storms, floods and bush fires. New Zealand, due to its younger geology, also has earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Some have huge destructive power. Given the rate of global warming, we can expect storms, floods and bushfires to increase throughout the world. When natural disasters hit towns

and cities, hundreds, if not thousands of homes, business premises and community buildings are damaged or completely destroyed, cordoned off by the Police, some never to be entered again. The violence of a storm, bushfire or earthquake leaves a path of destruction that violates spaces in which the householder had a sense of the sacred, whether or not they were conventionally religious. In the worst cases there is no home to go back into. It is a tangle of timber and shattered glass, a skeleton of charred bones or a pile of pancaked concrete slabs. The owners or tenants stand at the gate and can come no closer. In other cases, some rooms may be intact, but the house as a whole is unlivable. No-one knows when the cordon will be lifted; whether they will be able to retrieve items necessary for survival, such as medications, and items that contain their memories, handed down through the generations. In the long period of recovery, even though the physical structure of the house may be damaged or destroyed, emotional ties are not severed. The home, redolent of memories, impresses itself on our hearts and minds, in our imaginations and, indeed, in the deepest levels of our being.

This article takes as its reference point the immensely destructive 6.3 magnitude earthquake that hit Christchurch and surrounding districts on 22 February 2011. Five months earlier, on 4 September 2010 and centred in rural Canterbury, a 7.1 tremor in the pre-dawn darkness had caused extensive damage to property, but no lives were lost. The destruction unleashed by the February quake was much greater. The earth jolted and tossed. Older brick buildings crumbled and fell. People caught in newer buildings waited in what seemed an eternity for the violent shaking to stop, and whole suburbs were covered in liquefaction.¹ In all, 185 people lost their lives and 6,600 were seriously injured. Tens of thousands of aftershocks later, the Canterbury earthquakes constitute a disaster on a scale and cost unprecedented in New Zealand.² Much of the infrastructure in the poorer eastern suburbs was severed from the city's. Altogether, 100,000 houses were damaged; the worst completely destroyed or unlivable. Twenty-five thousand houses were so badly damaged that they exceeded the \$100,000 cap up to which the Earthquake Commission (EQC) would pay the cost of repair or rebuild. Insurance companies invariably argued that properties could be repaired, at a lower cost. Homeowners felt trapped, locked in arguments with their insurers. Many repairs were subsequently found to be substandard.³ More than a decade later, some homeowners were still fighting for a just settlement. Whether or not a home had been lost, each earthquake anniversary survivors could be expected to experience 'numbness, depression, despair and anger' all over again.⁴

¹ Chris Moore, *Earthquake! Christchurch, New Zealand 22 February 2011* (Auckland: Random House New Zealand, 2011), 17.

² Katie Pickles, *Christchurch ruptures* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), 6.

³ Fiona Farrell, *The villa at the edge of the Empire: one hundred ways to read a city* ([Auckland]: Vintage, 2015), 299–301.

⁴ Peter Gluckman, "The psychosocial consequences of the Canterbury earthquakes: a briefing paper," 10 May 2011.

In the immediate aftermath of the February earthquake, survival dictated. There was little thought of saying 'Goodbye' or of farewelling a home formally. Some decided not to leave but to camp in their homes, without power, water or a toilet. Others left, never to return. Many thousands of Kiwis fled to Australia. For those who may have wished to farewell their damaged or destroyed houses, there was no available ritual through which to express their grief and loss.⁵ Like houses made of building materials that didn't flex in the earthquake, the church's liturgies were not designed to be adapted for use in a natural disaster of this magnitude. What was needed was a structure into which appropriate readings and prayers could be incorporated. The Anglican Church had a template that could be adapted for different purposes but it presupposed a congregational setting and was known by only a few.⁶ In the months that followed, some parishioners, including displaced elderly moving to a resthome, turned to their clergy and said they would like a service to farewell their home, to share memories and pray for the future. A few priests, known for their creative work in liturgy, quickly put one together or even made one up on the spot.⁷

Many church communities were plunged into grief overnight, as the earthquake claimed their places of worship.⁸ The Methodist community experienced wrenched, unmoored, unnamed grief with the loss of Durham St Methodist Church in the central city, the first stone church in Canterbury.⁹ Three men removing the organ when the earthquake struck were killed when the building collapsed on them. In the Anglican Christ Church Cathedral, up to 12 people were feared dead when the tower collapsed. Somehow, they had all escaped. As the city's best-known landmark, positioned in its heart, it became 'a symbolic marker of the devastation that took place' and also 'a symbol of hope for the future' in the debates that ensued.¹⁰ Although of greater architectural significance, the Catholic Basilica of the Blessed Sacrament, which had to be partially demolished, never attracted the same public attention.¹¹ Across all denominations, at least 27% of congregations were forced to leave their places of worship, due to red-zoning, demolition or severe damage meaning closure for repairs.¹² In the end 31 unsafe church buildings were demolished under the

⁵ For a community-based project, see Julian Vares, *Whole House Reuse*, exhibition film, ([Christchurch]: Sustainable Initiatives Fund, 2015] accessed on February 28, 2020 at <https://www.rekindle.org.nz/pages/whole-house-reuse-film>.

⁶ 'Schedule 2, A Form of Ordering a Service of the Word,' (General Synod, Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, 2006). I am indebted to the Rev. Ben Randall for clarifying this.

⁷ Helen Roud, 'Journeying together: sharing a time of transition,' ([Christchurch]: [The author], c.2012), adapted from Dorothy McRae-McMahon, *Glory of blood, sweat & tears: liturgies for living and dying* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1996).

⁸ Churches damaged in the 4 September 2010 quake had stayed open.

⁹ Mary Caygill, 'Living with uncertainty – spiritual perspectives,' luncheon lecture, St Andrews on the Terrace, Wellington ([unpublished address], 2012), 4.

¹⁰ Pickles, *Christchurch ruptures*, 128.

¹¹ W. David McIntyre, "Outwards and upwards - building the city," in *Southern capital: Christchurch: towards a city biography, 1850-2000*, eds. Graeme Dunstall and John Cookson (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000), 99. I am indebted to Alice Flett for this reference.

¹² Melissa Parsons, *Rubble to resurrection: Churches respond in the Canterbury quakes* (Auckland: DayStar Books Ltd, [2014]), 128. All buildings in red-zoned areas had to be either removed or demolished.

emergency powers of the Canterbury Earthquakes Recovery Authority (CERA). Church leaders called on the media to focus on the thousands of people living in damaged houses in the neglected eastern suburbs, rather than on the loss of church buildings. However, the fate of Christ Church Cathedral and responses of the Anglican bishop, the Rt. Rev. Victoria Matthews, stayed to the fore, especially with its deconsecration seven months later.¹³

This article seeks, firstly, to establish the need for a liturgy of 'The Farewelling of a Home', particularly after a natural disaster. Secondly, reasons are given for the lack of such a rite or ritual across western religions. Biography and poetry provide a few telling examples. Thirdly, it is argued that reinterpretations of van Gennepe's schema of rites of passage provide the flexible framework this liturgy requires, where transitions between phases are complex. Fourthly, the article examines well-known services of farewell involving either people or things, such as funerals and deconsecration, and pilgrimage, in order to identify prayers and ritual actions which could be adapted to farewell a home and form the basis of a liturgy suitable for use in two main contexts: farewelling a home at different stages of a family's life and farewelling one after a natural disaster. These prayers and actions may also prove to be important as people are forced to leave their homes due to the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Comparative textual analysis of the deconsecration of Christ Church Cathedral and the leave-taking of Durham Street Methodist Church will show the importance of lament in farewelling a building. Lastly, the article assesses the extent to which 'The Blessing of a Home' (1989) could be a springboard for creating a liturgy to bid one's home farewell, closing the door for the final time, with all the indeterminacy of 'closure'. The liturgy that follows builds on the theological principles drawn out in the article.

Literature review

Is there documentary evidence, within and across western religions, of a ritual of farewelling a home? If so, have scholars examined it? A search of the secondary literature using standard methods and a range of search terms found none, either a particular instance or a general concept; nothing in the Hebrew scriptures, New Testament or Qur'an. In cultures where populations lived in the same place for generations, if not centuries, the need didn't arise. In wars and natural disasters, when people had to flee with their lives, there was no time to say goodbye, so no ritual of farewell. For these reasons, Māori had no *karakia* to farewell a home.¹⁴ Farewelling involves a dual focus on what is being left and what is ahead. In the archetypal

¹³ Pickles, 140, citing "No strife with Dean – Bishop," *Press*, 13 December 2011, p.A3.

¹⁴ For this I am indebted to NekeneketeRangi Paul, Kai-takawaenga Māori, Māori Resources Librarian, Macmillan Brown Library, the University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

leave-taking of Abraham, responding to God's call to leave Ur of the Chaldees for an unknown land, he had a single focus, on what lay ahead. Negative evidence, in this case the absence of reference to, or provision for, a specific ritual, does not, however, prove that people did not farewell their homes, whether formally or informally. Priests and monasteries farewelled people going on pilgrimage, but all pilgrims were expected to return. Until the last century most migrants were not. It is possible that in the first planned migration of English settlers to New Zealand in the 1850s, migrants were farewelled from their parish church at Evensong by including an appropriate sermon and prayers.¹⁵ Given the higher rates of mobility within and between countries, collects for this purpose may have been passed down informally from priest to priest, as had been the case with house blessings before and after the Reformation.¹⁶ The focus in all these is on the person leaving, rather than the home left.

A biography of John Henry Newman, who converted from the Anglican to the Catholic faith in the nineteenth century, has a highly personal account of his struggle to leave his Anglican home. After his confirmation on 1 November 1845 he started to wind up his affairs at 'the old littletons'. Unsure of his future within the Catholic Church, he started the work of sorting and musing: 'burning and packing ... reading and folding – passing from a metaphysical MS to a lump of resin in an ink-glass'. Four months later he was ready to leave, but at the point of departure was overcome with emotion: 'I quite tore myself away – and could not help kissing my bed, and mantlepiece, and other parts of the house.'¹⁷ In this spontaneous act Newman both farewelled and revered his home; the kissing of furniture here is an almost liturgical action, and also symbolises his leaving his first spiritual home, the Church of England itself, never to return.

In the 1990s a few services of farewelling a home appeared in liturgy books and journals. Two which broke with traditional approaches to liturgical forms and content were written by women theologians and are still in use. American liturgist, Joyce Rupp, OSM, released a collection of rites of farewell in her *Praying our goodbyes: understanding the spirituality of change in our lives*. Three were written for people at different stages of the separation process, but curiously not from within the context of having to leave their home.¹⁸ In 1995 British liturgists, Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, produced *Human rites*, a groundbreaking collection of alternative and ecumenical prayers and services. It has a number of services of endings. A 'Liturgy for the leave-taking of a house after separation or divorce' by New Zealand

¹⁵ Email from Dr Ken Booth to the author, 20 June 2018.

¹⁶ See Jane Simpson, "The Blessing of a Home in New Zealand: origins and development," *Australian Journal of Liturgy*, vol.16 no.1 (2018), 7–8.

¹⁷ Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: a biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 319–20.

¹⁸ Joyce Rupp, *Praying our goodbyes: a spiritual companion through life's losses and sorrows* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, c2009), 126, 138, 141. [1st publ. New York: Ivy Books, 1992]

Anglican priest, Erice Fairbrother, is possibly the first of its kind.¹⁹ In 1997 in *Liturgy*, a Lutheran journal, Shawn Madigan produced a full service based on rites of passage: ‘Selling a Family Home: rehearsal of a future “letting go”’.²⁰ He framed it as a rehearsal for leaving this world, a preparation for death, with the connotation that the heaven that followed it was our ‘true home’. The implications of such gnostic thinking for Christians who lose their homes through natural disasters will be examined later. In 2006, Elaine Ramshaw argued in the same journal for a ‘goodbye blessing’ when moving from ‘a long-lived-in and well-loved home to a retirement home, assisted living facility or nursing home.’²¹

In an otherwise secular context, New Zealand Poet Laureate, Elizabeth Smither, has given a public window into her own private ritual of farewelling her home. Whenever she and her husband had a time away, she went through her final preparations. In her poem, ‘Blessing the house for departure’, she speaks of making ‘a furtive cross on the doorpost / or going into each of the rooms / breathing prayer on the photographs / on dressers, blessing the paintings / to keep their eyes open ...’²² The purpose of the prayer was to protect precious things, rather than to farewell a cherished place for good. Smither did this instinctively, rather than from knowledge of any historical practice of farewelling a home.²³ In response to Smither’s poem and the historical research undertaken for this article, the author wrote a poem about her farewelling her own home and praying for safe return, ‘Leaving curtains open.’²⁴

Rites of passage and a structure for farewelling a home

Although there seems to be no ritual in any western religion to farewell a home, a flexible framework for creating one already exists. Rites of passage, as famously elucidated by Arnold van Gennep in his *rites de passage* (1907), accompany the passage of a person from one status to another in the course of their life, and typically mark birth, the attainment of adult status, marriage and death.²⁵ Since van Gennep, anthropologists have identified a number of other phases in the life cycle, including mid-life crisis.²⁶ Farewelling a home, however, does not take place at any

¹⁹ Erice Fairbrother, ‘A liturgy for the leave-taking of a house after separation or divorce,’ in *Human rites: worship resources for an age of change*, comps. and eds. Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild (London: Mowbray, 1995), 175–78.

²⁰ Shawn Madigan, “Selling a Family Home: rehearsal of a future ‘letting go’,” *Liturgy* 14, no.1 (1997): 41–47.

²¹ Elaine Ramshaw, “Bring the blessing home: the many occasions for house blessings,” *Liturgy* 21, no.4 (2006): 22–23. For a transcript of a service ‘From home to nursing home’, see Henry T. Close, *Ceremonies for spiritual healing and growth* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, c2006), 93–99.

²² Elizabeth Smither, ‘Blessing the house for departure,’ *The blue coat* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013), 68.

²³ Smither’s response to a question by the author at a reading on National Poetry Day, August 24, 2018, at Scorpio Books, Christchurch.

²⁴ Jane Simpson, ‘Leaving curtains open,’ *Meniscus* 7, no.2 (2019): 33, accessed February 22, 2020, https://www.meniscus.org.au/Vol7_2.pdf.

²⁵ Arnold van Gennep, *The rites of passage*, transl. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 2019). First translated from the French into English in 1960.

²⁶ Gail Sheehy, *Passages: predictable crises of adult life*, 1st ed. (New York: Dutton, c1976) and Roger Gould, *Transformations: growth and change in adult life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, c1978).

predetermined point in the human life cycle. In the case of a family, the next phase in life may mean moving to a larger home as a family grows, downsizing when children leave or moving to a retirement village. While social scientists have identified these new junctures in our lives, few have recognised their latent ritual dimensions. Van Gennep argued that a tripartite structure could be found in all rites of passage: pre-liminal (separation from a previous world), liminal (executed during the transitional phase) and post-liminal (incorporation into the new world).²⁷ In this schema the participants cross a threshold, a *limen*, from one state to another. In the Hebrew scriptures the sprinkling of blood on the threshold also marked the ‘boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling’, a powerful transition rite and preparation for union.²⁸ In spatial or territorial rites in the Christian tradition, such as home blessing and the proposed farewelling of a home, crossing a *limen* is both figurative and literal, as householders pass through the door of the house for the first or last time. Victor Turner took the concept of liminality further. Belonging nowhere could be both a phase in a ritual and also a state, a way of being.²⁹ Women, who historically have been the creators and nurturers of the home, may not fit this category. Caroline Bynum, a strong critic of Turner, has argued that ‘liminality is not a meaningful category for women, because either they are permanently liminal . . . or they are never truly liminal at all.’³⁰ The significance for rites to do with the home warrants further investigation.

In van Gennep’s model, the separation phase in a funeral rite is dominant. In a marriage service, the aggregation or *communitas* phase has more weight. In the case of farewelling a home, if that home has been destroyed by a natural disaster or a person in a violent relationship has had to flee, the separation phase may swamp the others. If people are farewelling their much-loved family home this is likely to be shorter. If moving to a retirement village, the incorporation phase may have already started, especially if the farewelling is also conceived of as a blessing from one place to the next. Unlike the rites analysed by van Gennep and others since, the farewelling of a home and the blessing of a home are unusual in that they involve both people and things. This makes the transitions between phases more complex, because there are more factors to take into account. Those who never receive the expected insurance payouts to start a new life in the post-disaster world may remain in a permanent liminal phase. Others may not move to the final integration phase for different reasons, including the loss of community if neighbours leave to start a new life in another country. In contrast, there may be a very short liminal phase for the person moving on or selling a family

²⁷ Van Gennep, *The rites of passage*, 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20–21. See 57–61, 153, 157–59, for other rites of passing through the door.

²⁹ Victor Turner, in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The encyclopedia of religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 380.

³⁰ See Ronald L. Grimes, “Ritual,” in *Guide to the study of religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassel, 2000), 267.

home if they still have a clearly defined status or role. Using Victor Turner's terms for the liminal state, they would not be a 'symbolic outsider', on the margins of society.³¹

It is moot whether all three phases of a rite of passage can be completed within the timeframe of the rite itself. New Zealand liturgist Alister Hendery assumed this when analysing the *AZNPB* funeral service.³² Dutch scholar, Gerard Lukken, argues that while transition rituals need elements from all the three phases which van Gennep and Turner established, they do not need to happen within a limited period of time. For example, 'support processes' after the main ritual may have moments which 'condense as ritual.'³³ Of significance to pastoral care is his argument that if a ritual emphasises 'exodus and farewell' at the expense of the ambiguous intermediate phase and integration, it will not have processed the transition so 'further help from social work or psychotherapy must be called in.' With completion, there can be celebration.³⁴ The range of transitional situations calling for ritual response is now wider than ever. There may be 'ritual moments' rather than a full transition ritual.³⁵ The farewelling of a home is one such transition for which tradition offers no models for rituals.

Possible starting points for writing a liturgy

While there are no models to farewell a home liturgically, certain elements of newer rites of farewell could be adapted for this purpose. Five have been identified and involve either the farewelling of people or of 'things'. First, leaving a church building, where the primary focus tends to be on the building than the faith community uprooted from it. Churches, which in Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and Lutheranism are consecrated and set apart for the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, are deconsecrated. Nonsacerdotal churches speak of 'taking leave of a church' or 'the closure of a church.'³⁶ Second, the funeral service, now regarded as both for the dead and the living. Third, sending out. Monks were farewelled by their community as they went on pilgrimage. Complete services are now written for lay people to be sent out with prayer from their church community, perhaps for a new position or a new country.³⁷ Fourth, a significant newer rite of farewell is for a person at the end of a relationship; whether marriage or other committed relationship, to let go and to mark a new beginning. This may also involve

³¹ Victor W. Turner, *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969).

³² Alister G. Hendery, *Earthed in hope: dying, death and funerals: a Pakeha Anglican perspective* (Wellington: Philip Garside Publishing, 2014), 168–71.

³³ Gerard Lukken, *Rituals in abundance: critical reflections on the place, form and identity of Christian ritual in our culture* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 435.

³⁴ Idem., citing Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the bone: re-inventing rites of passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2000), 310–20, 323–32.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 434–35.

³⁶ See the Uniting Church of Canada, 'Resources for marking the closure of a church,' in *Celebrate God's presence* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 2000), 706–9.

³⁷ *Common Prayer: a liturgy for ordinary radicals*, eds. Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and Enuma Okoro (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 559.

farewelling a much-loved home. Lastly, the initial blessing of a home, first published in 1949, could become the basis of a service to mark endings, and bring people and things together in a powerful way.³⁸ Each of these rites will now be examined in turn.

To what extent could farewelling a home draw on services of leaving a church building? The Anglican Church in New Zealand had no rite of deconsecration of its own, so bishops had the authority to use one from within the Anglican Communion.³⁹ After 1979, when the Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA) published *The Book of Occasional Services*, its 'Secularizing a Consecrated Building' became the form most commonly used.⁴⁰ The bishop revoked the Sentence of Consecration then acknowledged the congregation's sense of loss for a building 'hallowed by cherished memories,' and giving thanks for 'the blessings, help, and comfort bestowed' in that place. As a rite of passage, it acknowledged the importance of both separation and integration phases, that God's presence was 'not tied to any place or building.' It also looked to the everlasting salvation where true joys were to be found.⁴¹

If ever there was a need for a primarily legal rite to also perform a pastoral function it was the deconsecration of Christ Church Cathedral. Public opinion was divided as to whether the Cathedral should be restored or demolished and a contemporary Cathedral built in its place.⁴² Some thought Bishop Matthews, a Canadian, was insensitive to the city's heritage and she came under increasingly xenophobic attack. Nine months after the February quake, 27 heritage buildings had already been demolished. Plans by the church authorities to make the building safe were rejected by CERA, and on 9 November Matthews deconsecrated the building.⁴³ Thousands from across the city and the region gathered in Cathedral Square to say their goodbyes. While the deconsecration used the Sentence from the ECUSA rite, the paragraph before, acknowledging the sense of loss, was omitted. Lamentations 3:17–24 was read but lament was not conveyed through ritual or symbol. A 'Litany of Thanksgiving' came after the Sentence of Deconsecration, limiting its import. Lastly, an important primal dimension was missing, a heart-rending tangi from the tangata whenua, since a whakanoa had already taken place. This ritual to remove the tapu of any dead was needed before the first responders could search in the rubble under the tower.⁴⁴ The Māori bishop, Pihopa of Te Waipounamu, John Gray, and Māori Anglicans looked on

³⁸ Jane Simpson, "The Blessing of a Home in New Zealand," *AJL*, 4–19.

³⁹ Email from the Rt. Rev. George Connor to the author, 24 Nov 2019.

⁴⁰ *The Book of Occasional Services* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 204–6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁴² See Patricia Allan, "The once and future cathedral" (PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 2017).

⁴³ Pickles, *Christchurch ruptures*, 136–37.

⁴⁴ For definitions of tapu, noa and whakanoa, see the online Māori Dictionary, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz>.

from the side. In these ways, the deconsecration held back the corporate and private expression of grief needed in a rite of farewell.⁴⁵ All these aspects of lament could be present in farewelling a home after a natural disaster.

The congregation of Christchurch's Durham Street Methodist Church took leave of their building in a memorial service on Pentecost Sunday, 12 June 2011. The liturgy was written by the Presbyterian, the Rev. Dr Mary Caygill, a noted pastoral theologian. Like grief, it moves backwards and forwards between past, present and future. The language is direct. The time had come to 'take leave of this building and place as we have known it.'⁴⁶ The Prayer of Thanksgiving, placed at the start, acknowledges natural disasters and the human response to cry in lament: 'Comfort us, Lord, in the aftermath of this disaster ... Shelter us under your wings when our homes no longer exist ... Meet us in our loss and brokenness.' The Litany affirmed the congregation's post-quake reality and God's call to journey in sadness and also in hope, walking in trust and confidence in the God who would never abandon them and always lead them. The liturgy then focused on the future in personal reflections and prayers by the National Vice-President. The Declaration commended the 'broken building and site to other purposes' and also made reference to God's unfolding purposes and the hope for a future presence in the city. In a final ritual action, members took leave of the site with a sprig of rosemary for remembrance. Caygill continued to reflect theologically on the significance of this leave-taking in addresses throughout the country.⁴⁷ Although the service had been written to take leave of a church, its direct language, clear emotional logic, and pairing of lament and hope are directly relevant to farewelling a home, particularly after a natural disaster.

Taking leave of a farm means leaving the land, one's home and one's livelihood. A service published in 1996, 'Liturgy for leaving a property', is even more relevant today, given the devastating bushfires across vast swathes of Australia over the summer of 2019/20.⁴⁸ Based on an assessment task by four theological students at the United Theological College, Sydney, it arose from the experience of one student's family leaving their farm after nearly a hundred years.⁴⁹ Reasons for leaving included

⁴⁵ Jane Simpson, "Cathedral deconsecration a missed opportunity," Letter to the Editor, *Press*, November 11, 2011, p.A18.

⁴⁶ Mary Caygill, "Durham Street Methodist Church, Memorial Service, Pentecost Sunday, 12 June 2011," 2. This prayer is based on 'Resources for marking the closure of a church,' 13T013, *Celebrate God's presence* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2000), 707.

⁴⁷ I am grateful to the Rev. Dr Mary Caygill for giving me copies of her liturgies, sermons and addresses.

⁴⁸ As at February 2020, the Australian bushfires had killed at least 34 people, burnt 18.6 million hectares of land, destroyed over 5,900 buildings and killed an estimated one billion animals. Some endangered species had possibly been driven to extinction.

⁴⁹ Denis Burns, Stephen Robinson, Frank Van Der Korput and Greg Woolnough, "Liturgy for leaving a property," in Philip Liebelt and Noël Nicholls, *Gentle rain on parched earth: worship resources for rural settings* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1996), 65–74.

rural recessions, consolidating properties or children leaving home. There was no reference to natural disasters, such as fire or river floods. The purpose remained ‘to remember, to say goodbye, grieve the loss of their land and home ... and proclaim hope amidst pain, and life out of death.’⁵⁰ The service followed the Uniting Church Communion service. In prayers of confession, the family asked forgiveness for its ‘sins’ against the land: salinity, over-clearing, erosion and leaching; for failing to do the right thing. Later, the family was asked to name ‘things where the property has abused us, for example plagues, fires.’⁵¹ There was opportunity for stories to be told and free prayer. Like a blessing of a home, the family could visit ‘stations’ around the property, including a place of high ground, and it could end either at the front gate or in a church. Symbolic actions included planting a tree, burying a time capsule or taking important items to the new home as mementoes.⁵² For liturgists adapting the service for use in emergency situations the sheer number of rubrics and possibilities may have been immobilising. Although grieving the loss of the property entrusted to them, the family could be assured that God would continue to be faithful, comforting them when distressed and empowering them in unfamiliar situations. Just inside the front gate they prayed for the new family and left the property.⁵³

When a house has been destroyed it can feel worse than even a death in the family. There is no body to be buried or cremated; the house may have already been destroyed in the furnace of a wildfire or domestic fire. In a natural disaster, we see the remains of a house and grieve for what was a home. At a funeral we see a coffin or a box of ashes. Both the person who has died and the home are embedded in human relationships. At the moment we have a ritual to farewell the dead only. *A New Zealand Prayer Book = He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* sets out the fivefold purpose of the funeral service.⁵⁴ Most are relevant to the Farewelling of a Home or could be adapted for this purpose. First, remembering before God the person who has died becomes remembering and acknowledging the home and those who lived there. This includes the householders and past residents, if known, members of the extended family, neighbours and friends. Those in a wider circle may include boarders, visitors from near or afar offered hospitality, and those who had sought refuge from a violent relationship. There may also be memories of rites of passage such as birthday parties and the ‘being at home’ of a wake when friends and family can see and touch the loved one, now dead. Completing the circle, some householders may have had their home blessed when they moved in.⁵⁵ Comforting and supporting those who mourn

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵² *Idem.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁴ The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, *A New Zealand Prayer Book = He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* (Auckland: William Collins, 1989), 811.

⁵⁵ See Simpson, “The Blessing of a Home in New Zealand,” *AJL*.

is the second relevant function, in this case for a home lost. The third, giving thanks for and affirming Christ's victory over death through his resurrection, could become giving thanks and affirming meaning in the face of the loss of a home. Fourth, making the final farewells. Of relevance to funerals only are the commendation and committal, for the body to be buried or cremated.⁵⁶

Today people shifting cities or moving to a different country may wish to farewell their home and be sent out from it. Leaving one's home for the last time and venturing into the unknown is a key theme in salvation history. The unfamiliar God calls us to journey in unfamiliar ways, not only metaphorically but also literally. As with Abraham, there may be a sense of 'call'. In the Middle Ages, monks going on pilgrimage were farewelled in an 'itinerary' prayer, reciting the names of patriarchs in the Jewish tradition.⁵⁷ In church services today clergy may say prayers of farewell with the laying on of hands when members leave the congregation, not only for formal ministries.⁵⁸ In neither case is God's call to leave one's homeland necessarily irrevocable. In a reversal of roles, the congregation could farewell their minister from their vicarage, presbytery, parsonage or manse. In a liturgy of saying goodbye to one's home for good the householder(s) could be sent out with the prayer: 'Grant (*name of the commissioned*) the strength to carry your blessing from this place to the next.'⁵⁹ Instead of patriarchs, the names of foremothers in the Christian faith could be recited.⁶⁰ Ritual actions could include standing in a circle to symbolise unending love.⁶¹ The transition ritual of farewellling a home encompasses both the past and the future. With its separation and incorporation phases, it not only includes but also redefines the concept of sending out: both for a family whose home has been rendered unlivable by a natural disaster, and also an individual or couple moving to a retirement village.

Prayers and symbolic actions from the relatively new rites to mark the end of a marriage may be adapted for the purposes of farewellling a home.⁶² If the separation has not been amicable or, worse, one partner has had to flee an abusive relationship, it may not be possible to go back to say goodbye. In this case the service could be

⁵⁶ Hendery, *Earthed in hope*, 164, citing *ANZPB*. 'Disposal' is the term Hendery used for burial or cremation.

⁵⁷ *Celebrating common prayer: The daily office of the Society of St Francis* (London: Mowbray, c1992), 767–69, and *The English office book*, rev. ed. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006), 227.

⁵⁸ Interview with the Rt. Rev. Brian Carrell by the author, October 8, 2018.

⁵⁹ 'Commissioning/Sending out,' *Common Prayer: a liturgy for ordinary radicals*, 559. *ANZPB* has a 'Blessing of Peace' where the priest may lay hands on each member of the household, 773.

⁶⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-church: theology and practice of feminist liturgical communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 142–43.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶² For Australia see Bradly S. Billings ed., "Release from marriage vows," in *A pastoral handbook for Anglicans: guidelines and resources for pastoral ministry*, 3rd ed. (Melbourne: Broughton Publishing Pty Ltd: 2018), 1st publ. 1988; and Dorothy McRae-McMahon, 'At the end of a marriage,' in Dorothy McRae-McMahon, *Rituals for life, love & loss* (Paddington, N.S.W.: Jane Curry Pub, 2003), 91–94, and in Canada 'At the ending of a marriage,' *The Anglican Church in Canada, Occasional celebrations of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: ABC Publishing, 1991), C24–C30.

held in a church or friend's home. Controversially, Joyce Rupp wrote 'A prayer for one terminating a relationship', despite the Catholic Church's official denunciation of divorce.⁶³ In a personal ritual rather than a public liturgy, the one bidding farewell finds 'a private room' as a safe place for meditation. They write a brief letter of farewell to the person, situation or memory being ended. Later in the ritual the letter is torn to pieces.⁶⁴ Although this ritual takes place in a home, the home itself is not farewelled. The separation and divorce rituals published in *Human rites* take place in a church and are led by a priest. They make no reference to the home.⁶⁵ As discussed, Erice Fairbrother's 'A liturgy for the leave-taking of a house after separation or divorce' has elements that could be used to farewell a home in other contexts. It emphasises God's love, the significance of the home, and God's continuing protection for parents, children, neighbours and friends. Ritual actions for the family, community members and celebrant include standing in a circle around a plain candle, reading a lament and then blowing the candle out. However, memories are not evoked by going into the rooms.⁶⁶

How could 'The Blessing of a Home' in *ANZPB* be adapted for the purpose of farewelling it? Rather than using physical location, it makes sense to structure the new liturgy according to the transitions of a rite of passage. The liturgy which follows has five stages: gathering, acknowledging loss (lament), giving thanks for the past, taking leave, and the blessing and sending out. The context most similar to that of the Blessing is farewelling a family home of many generations that will be lived in by new householders. Most different is a farewell after a natural disaster or if fleeing a violent relationship. Here lament plays a critical role, as in the service of 'Taking leave of a church building'. Under emergency measures it may need to be held in a church or community centre and led by lay people.⁶⁷ The home can nonetheless be farewelled. If the home can be entered, it makes sense to start at its heart, the living room, and to move outwards to the gate. Much of the imagery of the Blessing could be retained by changing tenses from the present to the past simple or present perfect. For example, the prayer in the garden, 'Make it a place of serenity and peace',⁶⁸ could become in the Farewell: 'This garden was a place of serenity and peace. It became a place of destruction / It has become a place of destruction', followed by lament for the loss of the land. Imagery particular to the Blessing would transfer as recollection only.⁶⁹ Given that memory plays a crucial role, the liturgy needs to offer ample opportunity

⁶³ Rupp, *Praying our goodbyes*, 141.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 141–43.

⁶⁵ Vienna Cobb Anderson, 'Liturgy for divorce,' in Ward and Wild, *Human rites*, 188–92, and Roger Grainger, 'A service signifying the end of a close relationship,' in Ward and Wild, *Human rites*, 170–73.

⁶⁶ Ward and Wild, *Human rites*, 175–78.

⁶⁷ With the corollary that they are trained for this kind of ministry well before any natural disaster may occur.

⁶⁸ *ANZPB*, 769.

⁶⁹ For instance, the wedding at Cana, offering hospitality, living in secure dwellings and enjoying quiet resting places, *ANZPB*, 771–73.

for reflection and spontaneous prayer from within the group. There is none in the Blessing. Since the rooms are not blessed, a symbolic object could be placed in each, evoking memories and encapsulating the significance of that particular room, for instance a soft toy in a child's bedroom. In a 'gathered silence',⁷⁰ participants can share memories, including milestones and times of brokenness, some of which may go back to childhood. In the last room, the personal objects and memorabilia are collected up and placed in a 'memory box' to keep for the present and future generations.⁷¹ Prayers of protection are said for the householders and family and friends, rather than for the dwelling; for them to be guided, guarded, encircled and encompassed. Final ritual actions could include sprinkling with water for cleansing and blessing or anointing members of the group with oil as a way of acknowledging the blessings that have been received in the past and those that lie ahead.⁷² The householders may pray a blessing on those who next will live there. After the front door is closed for the last time all leave in silence. Some may wish to mark the occasion and celebrate afterwards with a meal in the house or at another place.

Conclusions for writing a farewelling of a home

Despite the lack of models, it has been shown that liturgists who wish to create a service of farewelling a home can draw on a number of different liturgies of endings, some ancient and others modern, and also on services of blessing a home. They should do so judiciously. Van Gennep's framework of 'rites of passage' has explanatory power and also provides practical ways to identify the needs of householders, who request this transition ritual. In Lukken's explication the phases of separation, transition and incorporation need not occur within a single service or set timeframe. If so, it behoves liturgists to involve early on those who may be able help complete the process, such as psychotherapists and social workers. Rushing towards closure trivialises loss. Lament is appropriate, especially if following a natural disaster. Since lament is not part of contemporary western culture, it is even more important for it to be modelled. Like the Blessing, prayers need to be carefully crafted and poetic. Pastoral and theological sensitivity is needed. The Gnosticism implicit in phrases that contrast a home with 'one's true home' has no place in a Christian liturgy. Lay people may need to plan and lead the liturgy. Ritual actions can include moving from room to room and other places to remember and pray, standing in a circle to symbolise unending love, burying a time capsule, and taking away items to keep as mementoes. The purpose, as in farewelling a rural property, is to remember, say goodbye, grieve the loss of the land and a home, and proclaim hope.

⁷⁰ The concept of 'gathered silence' is found pre-eminently in the Meetings for Worship of the Religious Society of Friends.

⁷¹ Interview with Mary Caygill by the author, September 15, 2015. Caygill noted the importance of symbolic objects in the grief process, particularly for children.

⁷² These suggestions are from Archbishop Emeritus David Moxon, who wrote 'The Blessing of a Home' in *ANZPB*. Email to the author, December 16, 2019.

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