

The closure of a church may bring mixed feelings of relief and grief. 5 L's - Life, Loves, Lessons, Legacy and Loss shape the grieving process. What are the ways we can express and release these feelings? How can we end with hope? What is the legacy we would like to leave for future generations?

Life

Describe the life of your congregation: founding members and significant events and new church buildings over its existence.

Loves

What did you love about your church? In the space below write, draw or verbally share with others.

Lessons

What did you learn from your church? Write, draw or verbally share with others.

Legacy

What does your church leave behind both tangible and intangible? How would we like our church to be remembered? Is there a way we can seed/cede our faith into a project for next generations through a scholarship or church camp cabin in memory of our church?

Loss

Name the losses your church's closing brings to you, your family, your community and your conference. For example, with the closure of our church...

For me *personally*, it is the loss of a spiritual home. I am no longer a member of a congregation I loved and fought with.

For our *family*, it is a loss of a historical connection. Our grandparents started this church.

For our *community*, it is a loss of a gathering place for weddings, funerals, fall suppers.

For our *conference*, it is the loss of a spiritual support base of similar beliefs in the Mennonite church. It is also the loss of a financial support base for our private high schools, camps, retirement institutions and nursing homes.

We grieve and lament these losses. Circle the words that reflect your feelings about your church closing.

Relief

Exhaustion

Release

Disappointment

Joy

Anger

Shame

Comfort

Satisfaction

Guilt

Resentment

Confusion

Ritual of Closure: It may be helpful to lament the items in the church building and with the building itself. As a congregation, walk through and around the building. If you were a Sunday school teacher, put the books away. If you were a pianist, close the piano. If you were on maintenance, shutter the blinds and turn off the lights. Create or borrow a service of lament and closure that includes physical acts that help us move our grief from our hearts to our bodies.



Grieving Your Church's Closing

Ending with Hope

Grief has a way of circling around. You may find yourself missing your church at important times like the wedding of a family member or the death of a former member. Give yourself permission to feel the loss and absence of an important part of your past. Give a prayer of thanksgiving for your congregation.

Helpful resources may be found in the Psalms and Lamentations, and grief books by Alan Wolfelt and others. Talk to other congregants, your conference minister and conference chaplains.

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