

***General Guidelines & Suggestions for “Rituals”
by Ministries During Times of Transition***

General Comments: Why is “ritual” important; what purpose does it serve; how can it be an opportunity for the deepening of a community’s faith?---

Ritual can function as a dynamic and symbolic medium for the transferring, enhancing, and challenging of a community’s values, beliefs, memories, and visions. Through ritual we revisit our past, acknowledge our present, and signify our hopes in collective and creative tension with our faith. Whether we are lamenting or celebrating, memorializing or installing, we are exploring and enacting “symbolically” how the Paschal Mystery lives, breathes, and calls us forward in faith, in hope, and in charity.

By way of ritual we signify to those present and to the broader community that something important has, is, or will be happening. Those gathered recognize the sacredness of their mission, or the significance of the circumstances, or the event that is the focus, and the importance of each person and all of life.

In some form ritual encompasses symbolically what may have taken months or even years to transpire. It is important when planning a ritual to be cognizant of all that a community has been through. These experiences can be explicitly or implicitly incorporated into the ritual symbolically or with narrative, as is appropriate.

What is the experience? History? Change, gain or pain?	What are the consequences? ?	What are the thoughts and feelings?	What might be the lessons? Challenges? ? Calling?	What might be the graces?	What are the hopes?
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All with minds and hearts in dialogue with faith tradition and faith experience.

Ritual provides a time and a place and a medium for the ongoing life-giving task of community to continue in the art of discovering meaning and to reflect on those dimensions that are most filled with a sense of gospel value, heart, and purpose.

Where transitions can include an invitation to encounter Mystery in the realities of both suffering and joy, rituals offer us a place and a moment to collectively acknowledge and to respond symbolically to this invitation. Rituals provide experiences that seek an integration of mind, body, and soul in the Spirit as we live out the Paschal Mystery of ongoing conversion and transformation.

General Elements to Consider When Preparing a Ritual

These guidelines and suggestions are not meant to constrict creativity or freedom in the composing of a ritual, but rather, are intended to be an aide in its formulation where there is such a need or desire.

Basics to be considered:

- * Awareness and sensitivity to the local culture.
- * Awareness of the relationship of the local culture with the Mercy culture.
- * What is the particular context and community where a ritual would be helpful?

- * Who are those to be involved or invited?
- * Where would it be most helpful to take place?
- * Is it accessible for everyone?
- * What is a convenient time?

- * How can the space be set up so that it suggest the significance of what the ritual is about (simplicity is often the best way forward, but sometimes extra effort is appropriate).
- * Creating a space/place for ritual includes the physical environment as well as facilitating and inviting a communal attitude of tenderness and sacredness; a sense that the space is in some way safe can be important, such that you will not be interrupted by cell phones....
- * How long do you see the ritual/prayer service lasting and then work within that time frame.—too long and it will be a pain: too short and people will wonder why they came—

- * Integrating the use of words, music, silence, symbols, gestures...
 - words: Ritual is not the time or place to speak lots and lots of words; language during a ritual should be attentive to the special nature of the occasion and more formal in character but never stiff; avoid speaking too fast; make sure everyone can hear what is happening.
 - music: If using recorded music make sure all equipment is working; that you have a knowledgeable person to attend to it, and that they can do so seamlessly: if you have musicians be attentive to their needs and make sure everyone is following the same script. Do not have all new music. Practicing the music with the group before starting can come in handy.
 - permission: Make sure to get permission from appropriate sources for music and other printed materials; make adaptations as necessary and note as such
 - printed material: Make sure print size is such that all can read it.
 - silence: silence is a helpful means of allowing people to go deeper into their experience, memory, and reflection, and for marking a break from one phase of the ritual to another. Some groups will be more comfortable and appreciative of longer silences, and others will not.

--- body/mind/emotions: Where possible, try to integrate the use of the body's senses, including the use of movement or different postures. Do not try to do it all. Sometimes, a small contingency can enact certain symbolic movements or gestures for the larger group. Depending on the mobility of the group and on the facility, something as simple as sharing a blessing with water can enhance the experience. If you use incense or fire be sure to check out the sensitivity of the alarms.

* Vulnerability: Ritual events invite us to a place of vulnerability. They can be experiences of deep emotions. Inciting deep emotions is not the task, but maybe a result and even a very welcomed grace as the community realizes a new place, a deep sadness, or a profound gratitude. Facilitators need to be attentive to this vulnerability and to keep the experience safe for everyone, as well as to move things along as appropriate.

* Determine a clear outline of the ritual and talk it through with someone who has experience if possible. Get a sense of the flow and the pace.

* Know the ins and outs of the process you will use if this is part of your plan.

* If a facilitator or ritual leader is required, have someone who is prepared and in sync with others who are involved.

* If readers... are needed, have them sufficiently lined up before hand so no one is scurrying at the last minute. Have someone who can facilitate the coordination of these participants in a calm and orderly manner. Make sure everyone knows where and when and what they are to do.

The following suggestions regarding processes, readings, music, and symbols are only a jump start for those planning Transition Rituals. There are unlimited possibilities.

Possible forms or elements to include in Processes for Transition Rituals:

- Prayer of the church modified as needed; such as, morning prayer or evening prayer
- storytelling
- Movement or gesture; such as, walking meditation through an arch or threshold...
- Open reflection where those gathered can contribute to a collective reflection
- Guided meditation that might include a bit of history and hope
- Planned and/or open petitions
- Silent reflection... small group sharing...large group sharing
- Readings
- Music, chanting
- Antiphonal praying of a psalm or modified psalm
- Prepared reflection by someone specifically chosen
- Weaving, whether together in a movement, or actually making something
- Passing through a threshold/doorway...the idea of passing over has biblical roots

Possible Readings and Reading Resources for Transition Rituals:

- Scripture:
 - Genesis 18:1-15
 - Isaiah 43 and 65.
 - Jeremiah 29:11-14
 - Matthew 14:22-33 Jesus and the Storm
 - Luke 24 Emmaus Story
 - John 20/Luke 24/Mark 16/Matthew 28 Resurrection Passages
 - "Unless the grain of wheat...
 - Many texts, not usually thought of perhaps, can be helpful depending on their interpretation.

Scripture is an unlimited resource. Consider what the readings are of the day, the Sunday prior or the Sunday ahead and if they speak to your circumstance. Consider the Church calendar and the time of the year.-- Sometimes we do not have to "find a reading" so much so as it "finds us."

- Mercy heritage: Catherine McAuley's letters and *Suscipe*, the Mercy prayer book, various books on Mercy history including those on local foundresses..., MAST...
- *Reflections on the Spirit of the Institute: Mercy Day to Foundation Day 1991*
 - Reflection 2: Confidence in God
 - Reflection 11: Surrender Entirely our Own Will

Writings by:

- Macrina Wiederkehr, *Seasons of Your Heart*
- Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*, p.88-89.
- Joyce Rupp, OFM, *Praying our Goodbyes*, Ave Maria Press, especially:
 - Prayer of One Experienceing Adult Transition
 - Prayer of One who is Moving On
 - Prayer for One Going to a New Ministry
- Moving On Joyce Rupp
- Nowla N. Evans, *Meditations for the Passages and Celebrations of Life: a Book of Vigils*, Bell Tower Press.
- Thomas Merton's prayer in *Thoughts in Solitude*
- Margaret Mary Knittel, RSM, "No Scarce Grace" and Peggy Wilkinson, "Path to Divine Transformation," Spiritual Life Magazine, Fall 2005.
- Serenity Prayer
- Charles de Foucauld's prayer, "Father, I abandon myself into Your hands ..."
- *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim*, especially p. 186.
- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, see *The Prayer of the Universe, The Making of a Mind, The Divine Milieu*, and *Writings in Time of War*, p. 50-51.
- Jan Richardson, Night Visions, (about thresholds, p. 110)

Possible Music for Transition Rituals:

- “All Will Be Well”, Steven Warner and the Notre Dame Choir
- “Journeys Ended, Journeys Begun”, Weston Priory
- “You are ever a Part of Our Lives, Weston Priory
- “New Life New Creation”, Weston Priory
- “You are All We Have” Francis Patrick O'Brien, 1991, GIA
- “Lord of All Hopefulness” Hope Publishing, 1985, Jan Struther
- “I Am with You on the Journey”, Kathy Sherman, CSJ
- "Circle of Mercy", Jeanette Goglia, RSM
- "All is Well", Women's Song of God, composed by Brieghe O'Hare, OSC, sung by Marie Cox, RSM
- “Out of God’s Deepest Mercy, A New Dawn” Jeanette Goglia
- “Who Are We in Mercy?” Jeanette Goglia
- Weave Us Together Suzanne Toolan, RSm
- Labarynth Liam Lawton

Possible Symbols for Transition Rituals:

- Foliage: trees, plants, leaves, flowers
- Cycle of planting, growing, harvesting, and resting fallow...
- May wish to actually plant something
- Stages of growth
- River/Ocean imagery
- Celestial imagery
- Dawn, day, dusk, evening, night, and dawn
- Candles, water, incense...
- Photos/slides/PowerPoint... of those involved or of the ministry in some way
- Symbols particular to the work of that ministry or focus
- Use of bells or gongs...
- Threshold symbols: crossing over, going through...