



The Church of Scotland
Mission and Discipleship Council

Services of Linking and Unions



The Church of Scotland
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Services of Linking and Unions

Preface

Services of linking and union are part of the process of Presbytery Planning. This has not always been a popular part of church life, and the changes resulting from Presbytery Planning have sometimes given rise to controversy and ill feeling.

But God's people have always been on the move, always on the cusp of change. Joseph and Mary travelled 80 miles to Bethlehem and Jesus himself claimed to have nowhere to lay his head.

A time of change can be a time of hope, of fresh opportunities for co-operation, friendship, trust and sharing, a time of new beginnings. Change can release energy which flows from the Holy Spirit which is the very light and life of the church.

The aims of the revision of the existing service were to:

- separate the services of linking and union, which have different emphases and different outcomes
- include an opportunity for reconciliation which might be especially helpful where the process of Presbytery Planning had been controversial or painful
- simplify the act of linking or union and give the people a chance to affirm their support in voice and gesture
- offer an alternative set of prayers.

Services of linking and union are services of benediction which invite God's blessing on events trusted to be agreeable to his will and based on honest law. In the central action of each service the Moderator of Presbytery, representing the whole church, declares the existing congregations linked or united as agreed by the courts of the church. The people affirm their support by voice and action, and the Moderator then asks God's blessing on the new relationship. The central action concludes with the confirmation of the ministry of the new charge.

The service of linking is based on a service of the word and recognises the freedom and autonomy of linkage. It concludes with a prayer of dedication to love and service which is offered by representatives of the linked congregations and the minister of the new charge.

The service of union expresses the solidarity and security of union in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and leads to Holy Communion as the ultimate expression of unity in Christ.

Literature is available which outlines 'good practice' in the linking, union and closure of churches, while presbytery clerks will advise on the requirement for introduction, induction or ordination in the course of either service.

For an excellent discussion of problems of pruning and planting of churches, even more appropriate now than when it was written, see:

GILL, Robin (1994), *A Vision of Growth*, London SPCK

Daniel J M Carmichael
Convener (and on behalf of)
The Liturgical Group

2014

The Linking of Congregations

1. Greeting and Call to Worship

When the congregations are assembled, the Moderator or other Minister appointed by the presbytery says:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us worship God.

2. Hymn

3. Scripture Sentences

Paul said: Continue in good heart and the unity of love... and grasp God's secret. That secret is Christ himself.

Colossians 2:2

4. Prayers

Let us pray.

Almighty God,

we come to worship,

for you were before everything,

and in you all things are held together.

We find you in all creation:

in things visible and invisible,

in the splendour of heaven

and the wonder of the earth,

in the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,

and in the fellowship of the Church .

and above all you are there in the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we confess that we have sometimes been slow

to recognise your presence and discern your will.

We have not always lived up to our calling in Christ,

and we have distrusted

the hope of glory to come.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

God of mercy, you have promised to welcome those who turn again to you.

Help us to accept your forgiveness and dwell in us by your spirit;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Lord, give us joy in our forgiveness and strength in your glorious might.

Give us wisdom and understanding

that our living may be worthy of the Lord

and altogether pleasing to him.

And give us love towards all God's people

that we may walk together,

and bear fruit in active goodness of every kind;

through Christ our Lord.

Amen

5. Old Testament eg Isaiah 41: 8-10 or Genesis 48: 9-16

6. Psalm *sung or read responsively*

7. New Testament eg Romans 12: 1-12 or Acts 2: 37-47 or St John 4: 19-26

8. Hymn

9. Sermon

10. Creed, Affirmation or Hymn of affirmation of faith

11. Narrative

The Presbytery Clerk gives a brief account of the steps leading to the linking of the congregations.

12. Act of Linking

The Moderator says:

Will the congregations please stand.

Let us pray.

God of faithfulness and love,

we thank you for the worship and witness of our forbears through the years.

As we take this new step of faith,
help us to build on this sure foundation.

Praise and glory and wisdom,
thanksgiving and honour,
power and might,
be to our God forever!

Revelation 7: 12

Amen

The Moderator says:

The Presbytery of... .. has resolved to link the congregations of A and B. A basis of linkage has been prepared. It has been agreed by (both) congregations and approved by the Ministries Council.

Now, therefore, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I declare you to be linked in one charge.

Let us rededicate ourselves to the worship of God and the service of the Kingdom.

We say together:

In the unity of faith:

in the communion of saints:

in love and goodwill towards all:

we dedicate ourselves to the worship of God

and the service of the Kingdom.

The Moderator says:

The Lord bless you and watch over you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace.

Numbers 6: 24-26

Amen

[silence]

13. The Peace

The Moderator says:

Let us greet one another with a sign of peace.

All present greet one another with the words:

‘The Peace of Christ be with you’.

The Moderator says:

Please be seated.

14. Affirmation of Ordination Vows

Where there is an Ordination, Induction or Introduction, appropriate forms are used.

The Moderator invites the Minister of the linked charge to stand, and says:

N..., on the occasion of your ordination

you solemnly vowed

that believing in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

and accepting God's word in Holy Scripture

and the fundamental doctrines of the faith

contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church,

you would seek the unity and peace of the Church,

and that, inspired by zeal for the glory of God,

by the love of Christ, and by a desire for the salvation of all,

you would lead a godly and circumspect life

and would cheerfully discharge the duties of your ministry.

Do you now reaffirm your adherence to that vow?

I do

The Moderator says:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by authority of this presbytery, I now declare you, N..., to be Minister of A...
linked with B...

The Moderator says:

Do you, the people of these congregations, welcome N... to this new sphere of service, and renew your promise of encouragement and support?

We do

The Moderator may say:

Clap your hands, all you nations;

acclaim our God with shouts of joy!

Psalm 47: 1

Let us celebrate this new relationship!

The people applaud.

15. Prayers

Prayers are offered by the Minister of the newly linked charge, and by the session clerks (or other persons appointed) from the linked congregations.

The Minister says:

Let us pray:

Gracious God

we thank you that you send your Holy Spirit

to the Church and to the World.

We thank you for the congregations

represented here

and for the new linkage which has been forged

in your name.

We thank you for the skill and patience of those

who made this linkage possible,

and for the precious freedoms and opportunities

which it enshrines.

We thank you for the new ministry just beginning

and above all for the great bond

which links us as one family in Christ.

The Session Clerk (or other representative) from one of the linked charges says:

Bless us with the wisdom and power of your Spirit,

that we may bear witness with courage and zeal,

and commend the gospel of Christ to our generation.

Grant us, minister and people together,

fresh faith and vision,

new life and power,

and abounding joy in your presence.

The Session Clerk (or other representative) from the other linked charge says:

We pray for the renewal of the Church,

for the peace of the world,

for the well-being of our nation and community,

for the liberation of those in trouble, and the relief of those in need,

for the care and comfort of our families and friends,
and for the health and happiness of all people.

The Minister says:

And rejoicing in the communion of saints,
we remember with thanksgiving
the faithful of every age and place.

Keep us in unbroken fellowship
with your whole Church in heaven and on earth,
and bring us at the last to the joy and fulfilment of life eternal,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns, and is worshipped and glorified,
with you, the Father, and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen

Our Father...

16. Hymn

17. Dismissal and Blessing

The Moderator says:

Go forth in the peace of God.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you.

Amen

Union of Congregations

1. Greeting and Call to Worship

When the congregations are assembled, the Moderator or other minister appointed by the Presbytery says:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us worship God

2. Hymn

3. Scripture Sentences

How good it is and how pleasant to worship together in unity

Psalm 133: 1

Or

So shall we all at last attain to the unity inherent to our faith... to the maturity measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ.

Ephesians 4: 13

4. Prayers

Let us pray

Praise be to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
who chose us before the world was founded
to be full of love.

Praise be to God who raised Christ from the dead,
who appointed him Head of the Church, which is his body,
holding within it the fullness of Christ.

But we have often been slow to love.

We have been anxious and defensive,
quick to obey the promptings
of our own instincts and notions.

We know that the Church is the body of Christ,
but we have often been slow
to recognise his gifts in others,
and to find the unity
inherent in our faith.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

God of mercy

You have promised to forgive those who truly repent.

Help us to accept your forgiveness and dwell in us by your spirit;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Forgiving God, let Christ himself
be our peace.

Make us generous and tender hearted,
forgiving one another
as God has forgiven us.

Help us to use this present opportunity to the full,
singing and making music
to the Lord in our hearts.

For where harmony is,
there all goodness springs up,
all justice and truth.

A prayer of Janet Morley:

Christ, whose insistent call disturbs our settled lives,
give us discernment to hear your word,
grace to relinquish our tasks,
and courage to follow empty handed
where you may lead;
through Christ our Lord.

Amen

5. Old Testament eg Micah 6: 6-8 or Exodus 3: 7-12 or Deuteronomy 1: 19-25

6. Psalm (sung or read responsively)

7. New Testament eg Ephesians 1: 2-10 or 15-23 or St John 4: 19-26

8. Hymn

9. Sermon

10. Creed, Affirmation or Hymn of affirmation of faith

11. Narrative

The Presbytery Clerk gives a brief account of the steps leading to the union of the congregations.

12. Act of Union

The Moderator says:

Will the congregation please stand.

Let us pray

God of faithfulness and love,

we thank you for the worship and witness of these congregations

and for those brothers and sisters in Christ

who have gone before us.

As we take this step of faith

illumine our minds that we may know the hope

to which you have called us;

through Christ our Lord.

Amen

The Moderator says:

The Presbytery of... has resolved to unite the congregations of A... and B... under the name of C.... A basis of union has been prepared. It has been agreed by (both) congregations and approved by the Ministries Council.

Now, therefore, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I declare you to be united in one congregation.

The Moderator says:

a)

To the glory of God the Father,
who gives joy to his people;
to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ,
who brings new life to the world;
to the Holy Spirit of God
who brings us together in love,
we dedicate this union.

Or

b)

Let us rededicate ourselves to the worship of God and the service of the Kingdom.

We say together:

In the unity of faith:

in the communion of saints:

in love and goodwill towards all:

we dedicate ourselves to the worship of God

and the service of the Kingdom.

The Moderator says:

The Lord bless you and watch over you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
The Lord look kindly on you and give you peace.

Amen

[silence]

13. The Peace [The Peace may be omitted at this stage if it is to be included in the Holy Communion section 16]

The Moderator says:

Let us greet one another with a sign of peace.

All present greet one another with the words:

‘The Peace of Christ be with you’.

The Moderator says:

Please be seated.

14. Affirmation of Ordination Vows

Where there is an Ordination, Induction or Introduction, appropriate forms are used.

The Moderator invites the Minister of the united charge to stand, and says:

N..., on the occasion of your ordination
you solemnly vowed
that believing in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
and accepting God's word in Holy Scripture
and the fundamental doctrines of the faith
contained in the Confession of Faith of this Church,
you would seek the unity and peace of the Church,
and that, inspired by zeal for the glory of God,
by the love of Christ, and by a desire for the salvation of all,
you would lead a godly and circumspect life
and would cheerfully discharge the duties of your ministry.
Do you reaffirm your adherence to that vow?

I do

The Moderator says:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by authority of this Presbytery, I now declare you, N... to be minister of C.

The Moderator says:

Do you, the people of this congregation welcome N... to this new sphere of service, and renew your promise of encouragement and support?

We do.

The Moderator says:

Clap your hands, all you nations;
acclaim our God with shouts of joy!

Psalm 47: 1

Let us celebrate this new relationship!

The people applaud.

15. Hymn

16. Holy Communion

Holy Communion is now celebrated. The First Order (Common Order 1994 p 121) may be used, beginning with Section 20 (p129). At section 24 (Thanksgiving) prayer C is most appropriate, and at section 29 the people should exchange a sign of peace (section 29, p141).

If Holy Communion is omitted, the Minister of the united charge says:

Let us pray.

Eternal and living God,

we give you thanks that your wise and loving providence
guides and directs the lives of your people.

We give thanks for the congregations of A... and B...,
now united in your name.

We give thanks for the strength and security of this new fellowship
and for the skill and patience of those who have made it possible.

We thank you for the new ministry which is now beginning,
and above all for Jesus Christ
in whose truth we are united
in hope, confidence and joy.

We pray for the Church
for all congregations and committees of the Church
which are involved in Presbytery Planning.

Grant that they may always act
with courage, kindness and imagination.

We pray for the world, and for ourselves

Give us peace in our time.

Prosper all those who strive for harmony
in life and at work.

Bring healing to those who are sick
and relief to those in need of any kind.

Rejoicing in the communion of saints,
we remember with thanksgiving
the faithful in every age and place.
Keep us in unbroken fellowship
with your whole Church in heaven and on earth,
and bring us at the last to the joy and fulfilment of life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns, and is worshipped and glorified,
with you, the Father, and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen

Our Father...

17. Hymn

18. Dismissal and Blessing

The Moderator says:

Go forth in the peace of God.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you.

Amen