

# Closing Ritual

## (End of Semester)

*Your small community has been growing and sharing together for some time. It is appropriate to recognize and celebrate the end of your time together this semester—to mark both the end of this special time together and the reality that life changes as each new semester begins. This Closing Ritual will take the whole time allotted for your usual group session.*

### Prayer

*Begin with prayer of your choosing—perhaps a poem, prayer, or song that was especially meaningful for the members of the group this semester. Or begin with a spontaneous prayer incorporating the themes of closing and sending forth.*

### Affirmation

*Having spent time getting to know each other and sharing during the semester, it is especially powerful to recognize the giftedness of each other. All members of the small community (including leaders) participate in the affirmations both in affirming others and in being affirmed. The following suggested style of affirmation can be done verbally or non-verbally. If done verbally, it is nice to have someone taking notes so each member of the group will have a written reminder of the affirmations. Other ways of affirming can be substituted for this one; be aware of the time needed for this activity.*

***Affirmations will often take longer than you anticipate.***

Introduce affirmation as being a gift we can give to each other—a cherished time of recognition of our uniqueness and giftedness; a time for sharing positive experiences of the others in the group.

Ask the members of the group to think of **one trait or word** that they would use to define the gifts of each other member of the group or one trait that each person has shared that has affected them personally—be sure to give several minutes for thought.

After ample time for reflection, begin the process of verbal affirmation; be cognizant of time—each person should only take enough time to **name the quality or gift** that she/he has noticed in the person being affirmed and **give a one-sentence explanation** of how or why they recognize that gift.

**Verbal affirmation** can take place in any of several ways, a few possibilities are:

- Someone begins by sharing his/her one-word affirmation of another and the one-sentence explanation; the person who was affirmed then affirms another member of the group; the process continues until all have affirmed all the members of the group.
- Names of the members are written on pieces of paper and placed in a hat; to begin, a name is chosen and all share their one-word affirmations of that member and the one-sentence explanation; the member who was

just affirmed picks the next name out of the hat; the process continues until all have been affirmed.

If desired, someone can take notes listing both the person affirming the member and the trait or gift being affirmed—this is a nice remembrance; notes can be taken on the back of a group photo for extra effect.

**Non-verbal affirmations** can take place in several ways:

- Each member of the group can wear a t-shirt to the session on which the other group members will write their word of affirmation. [Sharpie markers work well for this activity.]
- A group picture can be centered on a full page for each group member; the name of each member is written at the top of the page; the other members write their word of affirmation around the picture. [Sharpie markers work well for this activity.]
- A business card with the group name or day and time with dates can be used in the same way as the group picture. [The business cards can then be carried in a wallet as a reminder of the group.]
- A piece of paper or cardstock can be used in the same way.

After all have had a chance to affirm all of the others in the group, you may wish to offer an opportunity of sharing hugs or other signs of peace.

## Personal Choice

*The end of the semester is also the end of the commitment of each member to this particular faith-sharing group. Members should be offered the opportunity to re-evaluate their own participation in faith-sharing in general and in this particular group. The personal decision to continue with faith-sharing whether with a particular group or not is exactly that—a **personal decision!***

*Attached is a personal reflection form for members of each group to spend time with before responding to either the small community leaders or campus ministry personnel.*

Mention that the group covenant was for the duration of the semester and now is the time for members to discern their continued participation for next semester.

Thank all the members for their commitment and participation this semester.

Emphasize that whether or not to continue faith-sharing and whether or not one wishes to continue faith-sharing with a particular group are personal decisions requiring thought and prayer.

Be sure that everyone is aware that each person's decision is the right decision for that person [*in light of this, it may be best to discourage discussion at this time in order to avoid undue pressure*].

You may wish to mention to the group that those who are asked to lead groups will have to decide whether continuing with a group is feasible in addition to leading a new group.

Distribute the Personal Discernment page to all members of the group and give a verbal reminder of the due date and the e-mail address for responses.

Pray together the Prayer for discernment (printed on the Personal Discernment page). Suggest that members pray this prayer each day until the due date in support of the other members of the group.

Explain that the questions given are questions for thought or journaling and that the purpose is to arrive at two decisions—whether or not you will continue faith-sharing next semester; and whether or not you wish to continue faith-sharing with this particular group; walk the group through the questions so that all understand what is being asked of them.

Make sure that the group members understand how and to whom to respond.

**Stress the need for time to reflect and pray about this decision**—each member should be encouraged to respond in the way and by the date listed on the form **after prayerful consideration**.

Follow up with members who do not respond by the “due date” given.

## Closure & Going Forth

*It can be powerful to celebrate and bless the transitions of life. This prayer may be particularly moving if members of the group are leaving campus due to graduation, study abroad, internships, etc. It is, however, appropriate even if the group is planning to stay together for the coming semester.*

*Explain the movement necessary for the ritual blessing prior to beginning the reading.*

*Here is the explanation:*

*Have the group stand in a circle.*

*The leader begins by stepping inside the circle, stepping in front of the group member next to him/her, and placing his/her hands on the head of the group member while silently praying for the group member.*

*The leader then moves to the next person in the circle and continues on to pray for and bless all of the members of the group.*

*As the leader moves on, the group member who was just prayed over steps into the circle and prepares to pray over the group member who is next in line (the group leader will be praying over her/him at this time).*

*Each group member follows along as those blessing her/him move to the next group member in line.*

*The process is complete after all have returned to their original places in the circle.*

*[The effect is of a circle collapsing on itself and then re-emerging after all have prayed over each member of the group.]*

## Explanation and Call to Prayer

For millennia, people have found that person-to-person touch is a powerful thing. People have shared touch in order to heal, to comfort, to empower, and to send forth. Tonight as part of our prayer, we will be offered the chance to pray for each member of the group and to receive the prayers and blessings of each member of the group. This will take place through the imposition of hands—placing your hands on the heads of the other members while silently praying for them and praying for God’s blessing

upon them. Your prayer does not need to be long or formal, in fact, many people simply open themselves up to God and ask God to be with the person before them. When others pray for and impose hands on you, just be open to God and to the movement of the Holy Spirit through the person who is praying for you.

Now, take a few moments to be quiet and to place yourself in the loving presence of God.

## Reading

**John 20:19-23 [NRSV]**

When it was evening on that day,  
the first day of the week,  
and the doors of the house  
where the disciples had met were locked  
for fear of the Jews,  
Jesus came and stood among them and said,  
“Peace be with you.”

After he said this,  
he showed them his hands and his side.  
Then the disciples rejoiced  
when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again,  
“Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me,  
so I send you.”

When he had said this,  
he breathed on them and said to them,  
“Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any,  
they are forgiven them;  
if you retain the sins of any,  
they are retained.”

The Word of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## Moment of Reflection

*Spend a few moments in silence, or— if time allows— invite people to “catch a phrase” from the reading.*

*At the conclusion of the quiet reflection or sharing a phrase, stand and motion the group to stand in a circle in order to begin the ritual of blessing.*

## Ritual of Blessing

*Invite the participants to perform the ritual of blessing that was explained earlier.*

## Closing Prayer

God of love and community,  
we thank you for our time together,  
for the challenges and the affirmations,  
for the sharing and the growth.

Be with each of us  
as we go forth from here,  
as we begin new journeys  
as we continue to grow and change.

Be especially close to  
*[name those leaving campus]*  
as they begin a new phase of their lives.

Bless each of us and give us the grace  
to hold this community with us  
wherever we may go

In the name of Jesus, our brother,  
we pray.

**Amen.**