

**The Stories of our Stuff**Congregation Art and Story Project

**De-commisioning/Re-dedication Litany**Written by Pastor Nelson Bock

**Introduction**

Oftentimes congregations and other ministry organizations obtain objects designated for a particular ministry use: furnishings and accessories, educational aids, paraments and clerical garb, etc. Sometimes these objects are purchased outright by the congregation out of operating funds; other times they are given to the congregation as a memorial or in honor of someone, or perhaps in response to a special appeal. In either case, but especially in the second case, these objects carry emotional and even spiritual value for certain members of the community, and may well have been consecrated or dedicated in a ritual.

**Ministry tools, like everything, have a life cycle, and at some point will have served their intended purpose.** They may wear out, or become obsolete due to changing beliefs or practices in a faith community. What to do with them? Often they get stuck away somewhere and forgotten, or perhaps are consigned to the landfill as trash. Who decides what happens to them, and why? **We suggest that good stewardship means consciously thinking, even praying about the most faithful way to “dispose” of unneeded objects.**

This means first remembering how any object came to us, both in terms of how and why it was obtained by the congregation, but also thinking about how it came into existence in the first place. Some questions to consider:

* Where did the materials from which it was made come from?
* Who were the people who likely extracted those materials from the earth, and under what conditions might they have labored?
* Where and by whom were those materials manufactured into the object they became, and again, under what likely working conditions?
* What were likely environmental impacts of this object’s extraction and manufacture?
* How can we honor both the labor and the geography which brought this object to us as well as the intentions of those who gave of their treasure in order to provide it for the ministry of this community?

Second, it means asking what might be the highest and best use of this object or its component materials once we have finished using it:
 Might it be gifted to another community which might make further use of it?
Might it be re-purposed in some way?
At the very least, might its component materials be recycled for re-use?

These questions are appropriate in relation to ANY object or tool which comes our way, whether for personal or corporate use in any context. However, as the Church which is particularly called to exercise and promote stewardship of God’s gifts, it is encumbent upon us to ask these questions.

Once these questions have been considered**, it then seems right and good to ritualize our responses as a means of affirming the value that this ministry tool has added to our life together and our gratitude for all that went into its provenance, as well as to bless it on its way as it passes from us to another life of service.** This is a way of accepting our responsibility as stewards for gifts we have been given so that God may be glorified in everything we do. The following comprises one suggestion of such a ritual.

**\*\*\* A reminder that congregations are invited** to clean out one or more spaces in their ministry facilities and re-purpose all or parts of them by creating a work of art that somehow tells the story of the congregation’s ministry, and to bring that work of art to the next Synod Assembly for sharing. The following ritual can also be used for re-dedication of that work of art to this purpose.

**Decommissioning/rededication of objects used for ministry**

*The ritual should be conducted as part of the community’s regular gathering. If a worship service, an appropriate time would be in conjunction with the receiving of the offering.*

***The Pastor or Leader may say:***
 “Dear Friends, the time has come to part with one of the ministry tools which has served us for some time. This (name the ministry tool) has been used by our community since (year). During that time, (identify two or three landmark events in the life of the community, especially if they involved use of the object). It is part of who have been and who we have become. It originally came to us (describe circumstances under which object was obtained, and for what purpose). Now, its usefulness to us has come to an end. We recall with gratitude the service it has given, as well as those who contributed to providing it.” (Here recall those community members who played a key role, financial or otherwise. If any of those persons are present, acknowledge them.)

“Let us pray: God who provides us with every good gift, we pause this day to give thanks for the gift of this (object name). Thank you for the role that it has played in making us into the community that we have been and now are, and we thank you for the servants who helped provide it for our community as well as those who made faithful use of it. Some of us may have a close personal connection to this ministry tool, and we offer a moment of silence for individual remembrance and thanksgiving (silence). It is also possible that this object may have been a source of conflict or offense to some. We pray that whatever hurt may have been done may be healed, and that where needed forgiveness might be given and received and all might be restored to wholeness. In that regard, we also offer a moment of (silence). Grant this, good God

**People: Grant this, good God.**

Leader: As all good gifts come from God and for our service for God, we acknowledge our responsibility to see that they be put to wise and faithful use when their usefulness to us has run its course. In that regard, after prayer and consideration, we have decided (describe the means to which the object will be put and by whom. If it is being gifted to another community, and if possible, have a member of that receiving community present to say a brief word of thanks, or else a statement from that community may be read. If it is going to be repurposed and/or recycled, describe how the various components will be gifted or disposed of.)

Let us pray: God, we give thanks that out of the abundance of your goodness we now have the privilege of returning this (object name) to your service in the world. We ask your blessing upon it and upon those will make faithful use of it in the future. Grant this, good God.

**People: Grant this, good God.**

Leader: Grant that as we obtain additional objects as tools for future ministry, we may be mindful of the impacts that their provenance may have on the Earth we share and on those with whom we share this Earth who labor as your co-creators, so that our stewardship may extend to the health and well-being of the Earth and the whole human community. Grant this, good God

**People: Grant this, good God.**

Leader: May we be judged as good and faithful stewards of all that we have and all that we do.

**People: Amen**