Order for Recognition of the End of a Marriage

INTRODUCTION

This order is intended for those occasions when a man and a woman who have experienced a divorce wish to acknowledge responsibility for their separation, affirm the good that continues from the previous relationship, and promise in the presence of God, family, and supportive friends to begin a new relationship. Great sensitivity to the particular circumstances of the couple will be needed on the part of those who assist them in planning the service. Considerable advance preparation may be necessary. The promises indicated within the order should be developed by the woman and man themselves, with whatever counsel they request.

The service is penitential in nature and cannot be construed to be an encouragement of divorce or a deprecation of marriage. It does not celebrate the failure of a relationship, but acknowledges that a divorce has occurred and that two human beings are seeking in earnest to reorder their lives in a wholesome, redemptive way. The service is a reminder that nothing can separate people from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Elements of the service may be used during pastoral counseling when a public service seems inappropriate.

Hope and joy are appropriate in this service as a man and woman pledge goodwill to each other and responsibly arrange for continuing obligations they may share.

If there are children of mature age in the family of the divorced woman and man, they may wish to share in this service in a supportive way. With great care, the one presiding may include them.
Greeting  
Introduction  
Prayers  
Reading of Scripture  
Statements of Commitment  
Affirmation  
Benediction
A divorced woman and man may invite the pastor or another representative of the church to lead the service in a supportive informal gathering of members and friends.

GREETING

All may stand for one or more of the following or for other words of scripture.

A
LEADER
Let us remember these words from Jesus:
Where two or three are gathered in my name,

PEOPLE
There am I in the midst of them.⁵¹

B
LEADER
God is our shelter and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.

PEOPLE
So we will not be afraid,
even if the earth is shaken
and mountains fall into the ocean depths;

LEADER
Even if the seas roar and rage,
and the hills are shaken by the violence.⁵²

PEOPLE
God is our shelter and strength.

C
LEADER
God be with you.

PEOPLE
And also with you.

LEADER
Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace;

PEOPLE
That we may receive mercy
and find grace to help in time of need.⁵³
INTRODUCTION

In these or similar words, a leader may explain the nature and purpose of the service. There are optional words for use if the man and woman are parents.

LEADER
We are here
to witness an end and a beginning
and to share the making of new commitments.

____________________ and __________________ have decided,

woman  man

after much effort, pain, and anger,
that they will no longer be wife and husband,
but they wish to respect and be concerned for each other.

for parents

LEADER
They are now, and will continue to be,
parents to their child(ren),
and they wish to be responsible for him/her/each of them.

LEADER
____________________ and __________________ are grateful to you,

man  woman

who are family and friends,
for your love and support, your efforts of healing,
and your presence here.

Those gathered may say in unison or repeat after the leader the following or other words of support.

PEOPLE
____________________ and __________________,

woman  man

in this difficult time,
we join with you as your friends.
We have been with you
in your joys, in your struggles, and in your tears.
We have not always known how to be helpful.
Although we may not fully understand,
we accept your decision.
We care, and we give you our love.
PRAYERS

One or both of the following prayers or other prayers may be offered. The second prayer is a prayer of confession and is followed by words of assurance concerning God’s mercy and grace.

A
LEADER
Let us pray.

O God, make us aware of your presence. You have blessed us in all our moments: of joining, of relating, of intending, and of beginning. Be with us in our times of separating and of ending, releasing us from those vows we can no longer keep; we ask in Christ’s name.

PEOPLE
Amen.

B
LEADER
Let us ask God for the forgiveness we need.

ALL
God of all mercy, we know that you love us even when we are not sure that we love ourselves. Embrace us when frustration and failure leave us hollow and empty. Forgive our sins, and grant us forgiving hearts toward others. In the confession of our lips, show us now the promise of a new day, the springtime of the forgiven; through Jesus Christ, who is able to make all things new. Amen.

LEADER
God’s love for us is shown in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
READING OF SCRIPTURE

One or more lessons may be read. The man and woman, other family members, or friends may assist with the scripture reading.

PSALMS
Psalms 13; 31:1-2, 9-10, 14, 16; 91:1-6, 9-12; 130:1-7

NEW TESTAMENT
Mark 4:35-41
Mark 9:33-37, if children are involved
Romans 8:35, 37-39
1 John 4:1-12, 19-21

STATEMENTS OF COMMITMENT

In these or similar words, the leader may invite the woman and man to speak words leading to hope about the future.

LEADER

and

some of us/your family and friends were present when you made your commitment to marriage.

Before God, and all of us,
we invite you to share the new commitments you are prepared to make.

Here may follow personal words spoken by the woman and man. The words may express some of the agreements they have made with each other after much work, anguish, and counseling. Areas that may be included are:

• regret, apology, and confession related to unfulfilled intentions;
• mutual care and respect;
• support and care for their children;
• the need for supportive friends;
• affirmation of good continuing from their life together.

The leader may invite words of support and love from those present or from a representative among them.
AFFIRMATION

The leader or the entire gathering may say these or similar words of affirmation. There are optional words that recognize the presence of children from the relationship.

LEADER/ALL

We affirm you in the new commitments you have made: commitments which find you separated but still concerned about each other and wishing each other goodwill,

commitments which enable you to support and to love your child(ren),

and commitments which help to heal the pain you may feel. Count on God's presence; trust our support; begin anew.

BENEDICTION

A

LEADER

Go in peace.

PEOPLE

Amen.

B

LEADER

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

PEOPLE

Amen. 55