

House Blessing After a Death

This is a short service of blessing in a multi-faith context to bless a home after a death. It is adapted from a service, written by Rev. Olivia Dawson, and includes a number of different options for rituals of blessing (such as lighting a candle, planting a tree, and sprinkling water).

GREETING

Kia tau ki a tātou katoa te atawhai me te rangimārie o te Atua.

Grace and peace be with us all from God.

We gather today in memory of [name]

and to bless the [flat/house/college] where [he/she/they] lived and studied, slept and gathered with friends, loved ones, and neighbours.

The blessing of a [flat/house/college] after one dies is done as a ritual of transition.

In gathering we remember with thanksgiving the life that has been,
we acknowledge the reality of death, comforting one another in our grief,
and we recognise in our grief the enduring nature of love even beyond death.

And so in our sadness today, we also dare to give voice to hope,
that *all* of our human existence,
our living and our rejoicing, our suffering and our dying,
is not lost to the sands of time,
but is held in the eternal hands of love,
the One in whom we live and move and have our being.

Our lives are but moments in time,
but the land remembers and these walls remember.
And ultimately, God remembers. All life is held in the memory of God.
The memory of the laughter, the care, the fellowship.
The memory of the pain, the anguish, the loneliness.
And so we bless this place,
acknowledging the presence of God here,
remembering, sanctifying, healing, redeeming,
and preparing the way for the future memories to be created.

Today, I will be praying to and referring to God.
You might pray differently or not at all and that's ok.
Regardless, we all gather to remember [name].
We all gather in that same Spirit of love and peace and hope.

Let us begin by pausing, to focus for a moment
and to silently reflect on why we are gathered.
I invite you to take a deep breath,
attending to the breath of life in our bodies.
Breathing in and breathing out.
May our hearts, minds, and bodies be filled with peace
of the breath of life sustaining all things.

A moment of silence

PRAYER

Kia inoi tātou. Let us pray.

E te Atua, O God, Giver of Peace,
we come together to remember and to thank you for [name],
the flatmate, neighbour, friend, [and other] of those gathered here.
We offer [him/her/them] to your care.

We acknowledge the tragedy of death,
the rawness of our grief,
and the enduring nature of love,
which our grief points to... *a moment of silence*

Hold us in our grief.
May peace be in each of our hearts
as we take the first tentative steps into the future without [name].
May we find support from one another in our shared grief.
May we be comforted by our memories of [name].
May we be blessed as we gather together and remember,
recognising in our shared sadness the beauty and gift of love.
Amen.

ACT of REMEMBRANCE

We light a candle in memory of [name],
followed by an extended time of silence.
If you would like to voice a memory, a thought, a word,
feel free to do so during the time of silence
and then, to conclude, we will recite the words of remembrance together.

Period of silence

In the rising of the sun and in its going down,

we remember them.

In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,

we remember them.

In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring,

we remember them.

In the blue of the sky and in the warmth of summer,

we remember them.

In the rusting of leaves and in the beauty of autumn,

we remember them.

In the beginning of the year and when it ends,

we remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength,

we remember them.

When we are lost and sick in heart,

we remember them.

When we have joys we yearn to share,

we remember them.

So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us,

as we remember them.

[Name] is in the hands of God.

The memories we share,

the present grief we endure,

and the hope we have for the future,

are shared by God, who knows our pain,

who is drawing all things to Godself,

and who will one day be all in all.

BLESSING of the HOME

This blessing may be accompanied by the planting of a tree or bush

Having remembered [name], we now come to bless the place in which they lived, studied, and rested.

The land is scarred and broken.

It remembers the pain and heartache long after we are gone.

And yet the land dreams,

holding in its soil the possibility of new, flourishing life,

receiving all that decays and all that dies, transforming it.

And so it is that new life is born from death.

We gather today in this place, our feet firmly rooted to the ground,

to this [flat/house/college] and to this whenua/land,

remembering our own mortality and dependence.

We are dust and to dust we shall return.

And yet we also recognise the deep tendency of this world,

and the deep *capacity* of this world

to bring new life out of death.

So we bless this place.

Out of the tragedy, may there be healing.

Out of the heartache, may there be peace.

Out of the despair, may there be hope.

Out of the fear, may there be fellowship and love.

May we learn to see in our pain and our grief,

the labour pains of something new being born.

May the old memories, give birth to new dreams.

May this house hold the promise of new life bursting from death.

Amen.

[We plant this tree to remember [name]
and as a celebration of the life that endures beyond death...]

OR:

This blessing may be accompanied by the sprinkling of water as the gathering moves around the house.

Having remembered [name], we now come to bless the place
in which they lived, studied, and rested.

Water is a symbol of both death and new life.

One can drown in water, but water is also necessary for all life on earth.

And so we sprinkle water around the house

as an act of remembrance but also as an act of committal

in the hope of new memories that will be created and nourished here.

At the doorway:

May all who enter through the doorway

be received with peace and respect

and all who leave through the doorway do so with a blessing.

In the hallway:

God bless all the areas of entry and exit,

corridors and corners;

the visible places and hidden spaces;

In a bedroom:

Bless all the spaces to the left, the spaces to the right,

the roof and the floor, and everywhere in between

where well-being will be nurtured, and people will flourish.

In the living room:

May this be a place for reflection and restoration, rest and renewal.

May people who enter this space find strength.

May this be a safe space for those that enter and gather here.

In the kitchen or dining room:

May this be a place where food brings nourishment to the body,
conversation and laughter brings nourishment to the soul,
where study occurs and minds are stretched and strengthened.

In the living room or other gathering space:

Bless those who will one day call this place home.
Bless those who will live here, sleep here, eat here,
study here, cry, laugh, celebrate and mourn here.
May whoever lives here in the future feel safe,
feel comfortable, and feel at peace.

OR:

This prayer may be accompanied by opening windows and doors in the living room so that light and air streams in.

Speak peace, O God, to the dark memories
confined in these walls and in our own hearts:
the fear, despair, burdens and anguish that have remained hidden from the light;
a past locked away, stagnating unseen and unspoken,
and yet reaching ever into the present.

[Open windows and doors]

We unlock the doors and windows of this place.
Shine your light into the darkest crevice.
Blow your Spirit into the dustiest corner.
That this house and our lives will no longer be tombs to the past,
but a womb for new life to grow.

Cast out all fear and anxiety for the present, we pray.
May this house be a place of rest for [flatmates' name(s)],
and a home as they continue their life together here.

Breathe living breath, O God, into this place and into [flatmates' name(s)].
Even as this house is a place of rest,
may it also be a place of creativity and recreation;
a place of hospitality and welcome;
a place of care, compassion, and healing;
a place to be sent from and to be called back to.
May it be for [flatmates' name(s)] a place in which they come to glimpse
your renewing life disrupting our everyday existence.
Make the ordinary extraordinary and the mundane sacred.
Amen.

SENDING

This ceremony of remembrance and blessing has come to an end.
But our grief is only just beginning.
It will take many forms as we come to terms with our loss.
Just as our love endures, so too does the grief of loving in absence.
So we blow out this candle, knowing that the eternal flame of love
shines on in the darkness. Unextinguishable.

Blow out candle

There is a bowl of water by the exit.
If you would like, you are welcome to touch the water as you leave.
Water is both a symbol of death and of life.
And so may it be for us both a reminder of our own mortality
and the ongoing grief that we endure,
as well as a symbol of hope and of new life.
We are blessed with the water of life,
raised up like a plant from the decaying soil,
learning to live life anew out of our grief. Go in peace.