

A Rite of Decommissioning and Thanksgiving

Emmanuel Lutheran Church · In the Space of the ESEC

GATHERING

The pastor gathers the congregation in the space previously used by the ESEC.

Pastor: We gather in this space today not to mourn, but to remember — and to give thanks. For more than forty years, this fellowship hall, this hallway, these rooms, these floors held the laughter, the meals, the conversations, and the care of the Emmanuel Senior Enrichment Center. Aging adults and those with disabilities found a home here. And in welcoming them, we were ourselves enriched.

Pastor: Let us begin where we always begin — with gratitude to the God who calls us to love our neighbors.

A LITANY OF THANKSGIVING

The pastor may gesture to the space as each value is named.

Pastor: For more than four decades, this partnership helped us live out what we believe. We say we value inclusivity — and here, aging adults and people with disabilities found welcome, dignity, and belonging.

People We give thanks to God.

Pastor: We say we value generosity — and here, we shared our space, our resources, and ourselves at little to no cost, trusting that what we gave away would come back multiplied in blessing for the sake of our neighbors, our community and the world.

People We give thanks to God.

Pastor: We say we value community — and here, our building became not just a home for those who worship, but a gift to the broader High Point community. The ESEC bore our name, and we bore the joy of their work.

People We give thanks to God.

Pastor: For the staff who showed up faithfully. For the volunteers who served alongside them. For the participants who trusted us with their care. For the families who believed their loved ones were safe here.

People We give thanks to God.

A READING FROM JOSHUA 4:1–7

The pastor reads the following passage.

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

Pastor: The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

The pastor offers a brief reflection in their own words, drawing on the following themes.

In Joshua’s time, God’s people had just crossed through an impossible place — and before they moved on, God stopped them. “Pick up stones,” God said. “Mark this. Remember it. So that when your children ask what happened here, you’ll have something to point to.”

That’s what we’re doing today. We are picking up stones.

This space is one of those stones. For more than forty years, something happened here. Vulnerable people were cared for. Our congregation’s values — the ones we say define us — were given flesh and form in these rooms. We were not just a church that talked about inclusivity and generosity and community. We were a church that made space for it, quite literally.

The ESEC has crossed into a new place now. And before we move on — before we fill these rooms with the next thing — we stop. We remember. We give thanks. And we trust that the God who was present here has not gone anywhere.

A TIME OF HONEST REFLECTION

A moment of silence may be kept.

Pastor: Our partnership was not without difficulty. The process of this transition was long. There were moments of misunderstanding, tension, and hurt on all sides. We do not believe any of us navigated every part of this perfectly. And so, we pause to lay that down — not to assign blame, but to release it to the God who redeems all things.

Pastor: Gracious God,

All: We confess that we did not always get this right. We brought our own fears, frustrations, and failures to this relationship. Forgive us where we caused harm. Heal what was broken. And free us — and our partners at the ESEC — to move forward without the weight of what was hard. May your grace have the last word. Amen.

SHARING OF STORIES

The pastor invites the congregation to share. Allow 3–5 minutes. A gentle prompt may help open the space.

Pastor: Before we pray and offer our blessing, I want to open the floor. Many of you knew the ESEC up close — as volunteers, as neighbors, as people who knew clients, or simply as members who passed through these halls for decades. If you'd like to share a memory, a word of gratitude, or something this partnership meant to you, we would love to hear it.

After sharing, the pastor may briefly receive what was offered and transition:

Pastor: Thank you. These stories are themselves a form of prayer — like stones that tell us and God: this mattered. This was real. This is worth remembering.

LOOKING FORWARD

Pastor: This space does not sit empty. Even now, it is being filled with new expressions of the same calling — to welcome, to serve, to build community. Our partners at High Point Community Theatre are bringing the gift of the arts and creative expression into this building. Communities in Schools of High Point is using this space for their Construction Skills program, equipping young people with tools for a future. The legacy of this place — a place that serves those beyond our walls — continues.

Pastor: And only God knows what more is yet to come.

People Thanks be to God.

BLESSING OF THE SPACE

The pastor may extend a hand toward the space.

Pastor: We bless this space. May it continue to be holy ground — not because of what we do here, but because of whose we are. May all who enter find welcome. May all who serve here find purpose. And may this congregation never stop asking how this building, all our resources, our ourselves might be a gift to the community of High Point God has called us to love.

People Amen.

The rite concludes. The congregation may depart or remain in fellowship.