Help! Throw Me a Liturgical Lifeline!
Every year I receive requests from former students in need of liturgical help for unique pastoral circumstances. One e-mail was titled "Help! Throw me a liturgical lifeline!" A long-time member is leaving the congregation, or a retired minister is being honoured with the title Minister Emeritus, or a community centre is being opened—and in each instance an appropriate liturgy, ceremony, or ritual is needed. The request typically comes mixed with exasperation: "There's no service in Celebrate God's Presence for this!"

Pastoral Occasions: Endings and Beginnings
The committee that worked on Celebrate God's Presence struggled with just such a challenge. The result is the section titled "Celebrate God's Presence in Pastoral Occasions," numbering over 200 pages, the most material of its kind in any denominational liturgical resource and worthy of close study. But even with this, the possible omissions are infinite, for no resource can hope to cover all the liturgical possibilities in pastoral life. However, what can be gleaned from such liturgies is a common theme that can help us think through and respond to whatever may present itself. What they have in common is the ritualization of transitions; they are liturgies of endings and beginnings.

The Context of Weekly Worship
There is a sense in which all worship is about endings and beginnings, the end of 'former things' and the beginning of the 'new thing' God is doing with us and our world. It is for this reason that placing such pastoral liturgies in weekly worship as a response to the Word is still to be commended. Just about any Sunday is an appropriate day to acknowledge and celebrate the endings and beginnings in our life together. Seeing the connections between the Big Ending and Beginning (our Easter faith) and our smaller endings and beginnings (whatever the event) helps us name and celebrate such occasions in the language of faith.

Services for Times of Transition
In the Pastoral Occasions section of Celebrate God's Presence is a one-page outline titled "Services for Times of Transition" (p. 611). Drawn from the United Methodist resource, Ritual in a New Day, the outline was originally titled "Endings and Beginnings." It is a 'simple,' five-part outline for such liturgies consisting of: Statement of Occasion, History Remembered, Word and Symbol, Response, and Sending Forth. Rubrics offer further directions and suggestions. I've used it for everything from blessing a church family as they take leave of a congregation (a three-minute celebration following the Word and before the Peace and Offering in Sunday worship), to guiding a community group through its design of a ceremonial opening of a family shelter (in which the outline was adapted for a more interfaith context). The possible applications are many and invite collaborative planning and participation to allow it to become truly leitourgia, the work of the people. Finally, note the familiarity of the order itself. It bears a purposeful resemblance to the classic shape of Sunday worship and points to the deep ritual structure of what scholars call the ordo of Christian liturgy. I'm always impressed by how the ritual wisdom of such ancient structures can help us in very contemporary circumstances.