



*Called to
Be the Church*
THE JOURNEY

THE CONGREGATIONAL GIVING PROGRAM

**WORSHIP
SAMPLER**

Called to Be the Church: The Journey
The Congregational Giving Program: Worship Sampler



Copyright © 2021
The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada



The content of this resource is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd) Licence.

To view a copy of this licence, visit creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/ca. Any copy must include the United Church copyright notice and the Creative Commons licence.

All biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Care has been taken to trace ownership of copyright material contained in this text. The publisher will gratefully accept any information that will enable it to rectify any reference or credit in subsequent printings.

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200
Toronto, ON
Canada M8X 2Y4
1-800-268-3781
united-church.ca

Supported by Mission & Service

Research and writing: The General Council Philanthropy Unit

Cover Design: Christopher Dumas, Graphics and Print
Layout: Ian Ball, Graphics and Print

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. LECTIONARY WORSHIP STARTERS.....	7
3. WEEK 1 FROM EACH WORSHIP SERIES.....	10
a. Discover Your Gifts—Share Your Gifts: Five Sundays in Epiphany	10
b. Loving Our Neighbours: Worship for Five Sundays of Lent	18
c. The Early Church in Eastertide: Worship for Five Sundays after Easter	34
d. 28 Days to Thanksgiving : Offering Our Gratitude.....	46
e. Season of Gratitude: World Communion Sunday to All Saints'	56
f. Discipleship Is Stewardship: Five Sundays for Any Time of the Year	68
g. Loving Our Neighbours Near and Far: A Program for Any Three Weeks.....	90
h. All in One Gratitude Sunday: A Single Sunday Program.....	96
4. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	106
Coaching and Support	106
Videos.....	107
Discipleship Resource	108

NEW

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

**Program: united-church.ca/stewardship
Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship**

1. Introduction

A full range of worship resources

Called to Be the Church offers an abundance of worship resources. We encourage you to select from the wide choice of ideas found in the liturgies, sermons, and children/youth programs and adapt them for your own community of faith.

- Use them as written.
- Adapt them to suit your context.
- Use them as a jumping-off point for your own creativity.

Ideally, worship and children/youth programs will be integrated, so it would be wise to have worship leaders and Sunday school leaders review the resources together.

Once you decide which worship series you want, go to the Stewardship in Worship page at united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship and download all the materials.

A word about each series

1. Discover Your Gifts—Share Your Gifts: Five Sundays in Epiphany

Over five weeks (plus January 6, the day of Epiphany), we will take a closer look at what a variety of texts have to say about gifts that are revealed to us—and what it means to share those gifts as a fundamental part of discipleship. Being disciples is not easy: it takes courage to follow the One who turns the world upside-down. Having the audacity to look around and see that we have more than enough and then to share all that we have is a task that calls to us each and every day in our worship, prayer, study, learning, and growing. And the Season of Epiphany is a perfect time for those gifts to be revealed to us and for us to find ways to share them!

These resources were collaboratively prepared by: Catherine Stuart, Regional Minister for Children, Youth, and Young Adults in the Atlantic Regions (who lives in Riverview, New Brunswick); Evan ᐃᐅᐅ Smith, Toronto Urban Native Ministry, Shining Waters Region; Ian March-MacCuish, First United Church, Mount Pearl, NL, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region; and Matthew Fillier, Lead Minister of Bedford United Church, Bedford, NS, Region 15.

NEW

2. Loving Our Neighbours: Worship for Five Sundays of Lent

We know that growing in the Way of Jesus is an intentional act. It's not a spectator sport. This five-week giving program explores Lenten practices as a way to help the congregation grow in faith. Worship liturgies were prepared by the Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, with sermons by the Rev. Dave Jagger, a member of the Philanthropy Unit Team. The children's programs were prepared by Jen Auger, formerly the designated lay minister for families, children, and youth at Melville United Church in Fergus, Ontario.

3. The Early Church in Eastertide: Worship for Five Sundays after Easter

This series of five worship liturgies, sermons, and children's programs reminds us of who we are as Christians and the essential ingredients that lie at the core of our communities of faith—awe and wonder, togetherness and community, having enough for all, the glad breaking of bread, and praising God. These are elements that were modelled for us in the Early Church as recounted to us in chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles. In this program, the congregation will dive into some of the stories from Acts, as well as some of Jesus' stories of the Kingdom of God.

These resources were prepared by Andrew Hyde, designated lay minister and chaplain for the Ecumenical Campus Ministry (Anglican, Presbyterian, United) at the University of Guelph, and Lisa Leffler, a diaconal ministry student at the Centre for Christian Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba, while undertaking a field placement with the Ecumenical Campus Ministry (Anglican, Presbyterian, United) at the University of Guelph.

4. 28 Days to Thanksgiving: Offering Our Gratitude

These worship liturgies, sermons, and children's programs provide multiple ways to express thanksgiving, to reflect on the change of seasons, and to embrace new beginnings. Each week, we are invited to think about and share our experience of gratitude, focusing especially on music, silence, food, and creation. We examine how our experience around these is limited by our lack of openness to difference.

The worship liturgies were prepared by the Rev. Dr. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Associate Professor of Preaching at Emmanuel College, Toronto, with sermons by the Rev. Dr. Kathleen James-Cavan, minister at St. Andrew's United Church, Imperial, Saskatchewan, and Associate Professor of English at University of Saskatchewan. The children's program was developed by the Rev. David Kim-Cragg, ecumenical chaplain at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

5. Season of Gratitude: World Communion Sunday to All Saints'

The liturgies, sermons, and children's programs written for these five Sundays in fall explore how we can show our thanks, culminating in a celebration of the work of the faithful. Weekly worship includes sermons based on Lectionary Psalm readings and rituals that engage all five senses and build on the theme of Loving Our Neighbours. The program includes youth activities/discussion points, an all-ages Sunday school program, and a children's time for worship.

The liturgies were developed by the Rev. Caroline Penhale, Team Minister, Congregational Care & Outreach, Orleans United Church, Orleans, Ontario, and the sermons were prepared by the Rev. Trisha Elliott, member of the Philanthropy Unit Team. The children's program was prepared by the Rev. Molly Bell, Team Minister, Faith Formation & Leadership Development, Orleans United Church, Orleans, Ontario.

6. Discipleship Is Stewardship: Five Sundays for Any Time of the Year

Stewardship cannot be separated from discipleship. Discipleship Is Stewardship might seem simple and obvious, yet the implications are far-reaching for those who seek to walk the way of Jesus. This five-week program, which focuses on 2 Corinthians 9:6–15, opens our eyes to the reality that everything we see is a gift from God entrusted to our care. How we manage these gifts is an act of discipleship, a spiritual practice. The five aspects of discipleship, gratitude, commitment, relationship, abundance, and thanksgiving, embody a full life of stewardship.

Written by the Rev. Mary Nichol (Pacific Mountain Region Staff for Education for Children's and Family Ministries), the Rev. Ryan Slifka (St. George's United Church, Courtenay, British Columbia), the Rev. Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes (Emmanuel United Church, Windsor, Ontario), the Rev. Bob Fillier (Trinity United Church, Prince George, British Columbia), and the Rev. Paul Douglas Walfall (Fort Saskatchewan United Church, Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta), *Called to Be the Church: Discipleship Is Stewardship* includes special NEW music by David Kai, titled "This Indescribable Gift."

7. Loving Our Neighbours Near and Far: A Program for Any Three Weeks

This series of liturgies, sermons, and children's programs form a three-week giving program that will fit into any time of the year either as a separate program or as a supplement to a similarly focused program. The three-week unit was written by the Rev. Melody Duncanson Hales and the Rev. Ruth Noble, formerly members of the Philanthropy Unit Team.

8. All in One Gratitude Sunday: A Single Sunday Program

With a focus on gratitude, this worship liturgy, sermon, and children's message can be used at any time of year. It is especially helpful as a way of introducing the principles of generosity, giving, and gratitude. It was written by the Rev. Roger Janes, a member of the Philanthropy Unit team.



2. Lectionary Worship Starters

There is no need to start from scratch!

If you have already used one of the lectionary-based *Called to Be the Church* five-week worship series in a previous year but want to do the program again for the same weeks this year, the Lectionary Worship Starters guide will help you. Following the five-week arc of Inspire, Invite, and Thank, the grid on the next two pages will give you lectionary readings and theme ideas around which you can build the sermon and worship liturgy for each week. You will also find appropriate hymn suggestions from *Voices United* and *More Voices*.

You can download it from the Stewardship in Worship page at united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship.

We are here to support you! Any questions? You can reach us at called@united-church.ca.

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

Program: united-church.ca/stewardship

Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship

Called to Be the Church

Lectionary Worship Starters

Week 1

Week 2

Epiphany 2022	Theme Hymns	Stewardship as Spiritual Practice	Inspire: Local Mission
The new five-week materials			
Lent 2022	Theme Hymns	Stewardship as Spiritual Practice	Inspire: Local Mission
Mar. 6– Apr. 10, 2022	<p>“I Have Called You by Your Name” (MV 161)</p> <p>“O Jesus, I Have Promised” (VU 120)</p>	<p>Deuteronomy 26:1–11: Making an offering is an act of generosity and an act of recalling what God has done for us and through us. There is a clear link between the spiritual practice of generosity and the spiritual practice of gratitude. Ritual helps create habit, and faith habits become our living responses to God’s goodness. These are hallmarks of discipleship.</p>	<p>Philippians 3:17–4:1: The spiritual practice of imitation of mentors. As we follow Jesus and those elders of the church who have gone before us, we learn perseverance as we do God’s mission in our local context. Tell an inspiring story of a local mission project that took perseverance or was multi-generational. How is your congregation encouraging others?</p>
Post-Easter 2022	Theme Hymns	Stewardship as Spiritual Practice	Inspire: Local Mission
Apr. 24– May 22, 2022	<p>“Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Give Thanks” (VU 179)</p> <p>“When Hands Reach Out and Fingers Trace” (MV 136)</p>	<p>Acts 5:27–32: Peter says that as disciples we are witnesses to what the risen Christ can accomplish in someone. Our practice of generosity is a witness to the joy of Easter’s resurrection life.</p>	<p>John 21:1–19: How does resurrection life surprise and appear and transform your community? The whole boatload of disciples is fishing together, responds together, eats together because of the call of the risen Christ. Sometimes communities are called to fish on the other side—to do ministry in new ways. What does that look like for you?</p>
28 Days to Thanksgiving	Theme Hymns	Stewardship as Spiritual Practice	Inspire: Local Mission
Sept. 11– Oct. 10, 2021	<p>“Will You Come and Follow Me” (VU 567)</p> <p>“Grateful” (MV 182)</p>	<p>Luke 15:1–10: I am worthy and lovable, as God has searched me out and found me (sheep/coin analogy). Realizing this spiritual fact produces great gratitude in me for what God has done. Great gratitude leads to great generosity in return.</p>	<p>Luke 16:1–13: We really like what <i>The Message</i> does with this passage. Be just as shrewd as big business and politicians and those we would expect to be dodgy, but do so for the mission of God. As a sign of its discipleship, how is your community of faith fully faithful with what you have been blessed with?</p>
Post Thanksgiving	Theme Hymns	Stewardship as Spiritual Practice	Inspire: Local Mission
Oct. 23– Nov. 20, 2022	<p>“Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples” (VU 507)</p> <p>“Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154)</p>	<p>Proper 25</p> <p>Luke 18:9–14: What does authentic generosity look like? If our generosity is not drawing us closer to Jesus, what needs to change? What is the relationship between generosity and gratitude?</p>	<p>All Saints’ Day</p> <p>Ephesians 1:15–16: If Paul wrote this to your community of disciples, what would he have heard about? Your mission within your community? How have you, in the past, in the present, and perhaps in the future, shown or will show your local community that God loves them?</p>

Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Inspire: Mission & Service	Invite	Thank
Inspire: Mission & Service	Invite	Thank
Building and following from week 2's theme of perseverance. Isaiah 55:1-9: How does the church host a party with no expectation of return? How does God nourish and sustain all of God's beloved people? Outreach ministries across Canada supported by Mission & Service do this all the time.	2 Corinthians 5:16-17: Invitation to not just be part of a new creation, but to BE a new creation, in Christ. Transformation. The spiritual practice of letting go. Invitation to generosity as a way to mark the transformation away from greed and scarcity and into the new creation of plenty and blessing and sharing.	John 12:1-8: Thanking you for whatever you do. Big, small, life-changing, apparently insignificant, whatever you give is like perfume on Jesus' feet, and Jesus will appreciate it and you. Tie into week 1.
Inspire: Mission & Service	Invite	Thank
Psalms 23: Through our shared Mission & Service we are walking with many who are also walking as together we seek green pastures, thirst for still waters, need restoration both physical and spiritual, hunger for a table to be welcomed at, comforted to overflowing. Share some Your Generosity Matters (formerly Minutes for Mission) stories related to these themes.	John 13:31-35: The new commandment. Love for one another is our clear calling and mark of discipleship to Jesus. Today you are invited into that command to make love real. What will your generous love look like?	Psalms 67: A psalm of blessing and celebration for all God does. Let the people praise you, O God. Praise and celebrate your generous responses to God's grace and action. Where are you discovering the Holy Spirit at work around you? How are you joyfully praising?
Inspire: Mission & Service	Invite	Thank
Luke 16:19-31 and 1 Timothy 6:6-9: A message for rich disciples. Take notice! In order to care, you first have to notice the person and accord them the same rights and worth as yourself. Mission & Service helps us notice the needs around us (local, Canadian, global) and to respond, so as people made right with God we can be rich in generous good works.	2 Timothy 1:5-7: "I am reminded of your sincere faith.... For this reason I remind [invite] you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." How could you invite people to rekindle the fire of faith through generous sharing of their gifts?	Philippians 4:4-9: Rejoice!! Give thanks for all the ways God has blessed your community of faith and how, as disciples of Jesus, you are committing to sharing them.
Inspire: Mission & Service	Invite	Thank
Proper 27 Luke 20:27-38: Jesus tries to get the Sadducees to see life as God sees it. Because you have chosen to say YES to the God of the living (which makes you a disciple), you make this ____ happen. Find a couple of Your Generosity Matters (formerly Minutes for Mission) stories to share as illustrations.	Proper 28 Isaiah 65:17-25: God's mission!! Generous disciples are countercultural and help God's mission come to fruition, even on the micro scale if not the macro. You are invited to help be the change.	Reign of Christ Luke 1:78-79: We give thanks for you and your generosity, through which you are God's light dawning from on high and giving light to those who sit in darkness.

3. Week 1 from Each Worship Series

a. Discover Your Gifts—Share Your Gifts: Five Sundays in Epiphany

Over five weeks (plus January 6, the day of Epiphany), we will take a closer look at what a variety of texts have to say about gifts that are revealed to us—and what it means to share those gifts as a fundamental part of discipleship. Being disciples is not easy: it takes courage to follow the One who turns the world upside-down. Having the audacity to look around and see that we have more than enough and then to share all that we have is a task that calls to us each and every day in our worship, prayer, study, learning, and growing. And the Season of Epiphany is a perfect time for those gifts to be revealed to us and for us to find ways to share them!

These resources were collaboratively prepared by: Catherine Stuart, Regional Minister for Children, Youth and Young Adults in the Atlantic Regions (who lives in Riverview, New Brunswick); Evan ᓄᓴᓂ Smith, Toronto Urban Native Ministry, Shining Waters Region; Ian March-MacCuish, First United Church, Mt. Pearl, NL, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region; and Matthew Fillier, Lead Minister of Bedford United Church, Bedford, NS, Region 15.

USE THE APP DISCOVER THE TERRITORY YOU ARE ON.

apps.apple.com/ca/app/whose-land/id1350310353

Week 1(b)

Epiphany 1, Baptism of Jesus

Greeting

One: God is good

All: all the time.

One: All the time

All: God is good.

Find the complete
5-week worship series
at **united-church.
ca/worship-theme/
stewardship-worship.**

Settler Acknowledgement of Our Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

Long before my people journeyed to this land, Indigenous people were here (*you may include names of local Indigenous peoples and/or treaties*), and they received from their Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. When they shared their vision, my people did not hear. My people tried to force Indigenous peoples to be like us, and, in so doing, we helped to destroy the vision that made them what they were.

We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that our church did not or would not hear, and how we have behaved as a church. As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority.

We pray that all Indigenous people will hear the sincerity of our words today and that they will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future.

Lighting of the Christ Candle and/or Rainbow Candle

One: We light this candle, honouring the One who said “I am the Light.”

Introit

“Arise, Your Light Is Come” (*Voices United 79 vs. 1*)

Call to Worship (based on Isaiah 43:1–7)

One: Come in, hearing these words:

All: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.

One: Come in, knowing these words to be true:

All: I have called you by name, you are mine.

One: Come in, feeling these words in your bones:

All: You are precious in my sight.

One: We come to worship, hearing, knowing, feeling the love and wonder of our God.

Opening Prayer (All)

God of gifts that transform, we gather in awe and wonder at the ways in which you name us. Throughout time and space, you have called to our spiritual ancestors, naming them and renaming them as your people, to live in delight at being yours. Today, you continue to call to us, naming and renaming us, that in our quest for delight, we might see in us what you see, and share that splendour with the world. May this time of worship help us to hear our names, that we might remember that your goodness lives in us and calls us forth to be members of your family, your creation. May your Spirit rest upon us now as it rested upon Jesus. In humility, we ask these things in His name, as the one who taught us to pray, saying: *(insert a version of The Lord's Prayer; omit The Lord's Prayer if it is your tradition to pray during the Prayers of the People below).*

Hymn

"A Light Is Gleaming" (VU 82)

"We Praise You, O God" (VU 218)

"Come, Let Us Sing" (VU 222)

"Bathe Me in Your Light" (*More Voices* 82)

Prayer of Confession (All)

Holy One, on this day when we bear witness to the baptism of Jesus, we hear a story of blessing, of love, of transformation. But over time, this story may have caused us to see ourselves as separated, as special, as those who are better than others. Instead of being inclusive and celebrating who we are and whose we are, baptism has sometimes led us to believe that we are "more special" and "more favoured" than others. For all of these beliefs, we are sorry. May we see the power of transformation that baptism holds and be transformed to see your grace, offered to all of us. Forgive and inspire us, reminding all of us that we are yours. Amen.

Words of Assurance

One: Throughout scripture, we are reminded that grace is God's greatest gift to us. Let us draw nearer to that gift, soaking in its light so that we might, indeed, remember who we are, to whom we belong, and that we are called to share your light and grace.

Exploring the Epiphany Box

Put a sealed jar of ordinary water into a gift box. Wrap the box in pretty paper and decorate it with ribbons, bows, and so on. Show it to the group. Ask them what they like best about it. Ask them what they think is inside such a pretty box. Invite someone to open it and show that what's inside is "only" a jar of water. This is a gift from God to us. How will we use it? We will share it. How will we share it? Water seems like an ordinary gift, but when we ask God to bless it and we use it for baptism, it becomes an extraordinary gift because it invites us to think about our community and our relationship with God. It enables us to reflect on who we are, whose we are, and what God calls us to do.

What kind of world would we have if we thought of all gifts and all giving as being extraordinary because they remind us that all we have is a gift from God to be shared with each other? How would sharing this gift remind others that they, too, are a gift?

Hymn

"Jesus Bids Us Shine" (VU 585)

"This Little Light of Mine" (*All God's Children Sing* 66)

Scripture

First Reading: Isaiah 43:1–7

Psalm: Psalm 29 (VU 755) or (VU 756)

New Testament: Acts 8:14–17

Gospel: Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

Sermon

The Gift of Affirmation (*see below*)

Hymn

"I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry" (VU 644)

"I Have Called You by Your Name" (MV 161)

Offering Invitation

We are indeed recipients of God's grace and generosity. God loves us and affirms us. But, in receiving, we are also called to give, to share, and to live lives of gratitude. Baptism reminds us that ordinary gifts can do extraordinary things. Baptism inspires us to use our gifts not knowing how they might transform. Our offerings of time, talent, and money will gratefully be received. Now is the opportunity to share your gifts to further the church's work and the Spirit's mission.

Offertory

“When Heaven’s Bright with Mystery” (VU 93 vs.4)

“What Can I Do?” (MV 191)

Prayer of Dedication

All: Gracious God, bless what we offer this day. These gifts, though ordinary, are given in response to your extraordinary love for us. Through your Spirit, may these gifts be transformed to reveal your extraordinary love and may your love be shared in all that we say and do. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Sing into prayer: “And When You Call for Me” (MV 96) or “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

God of Mystery and Light, we come to you this day in awe and wonder at your beauty and your ability to create and recreate all that swirls around us.

You call us to be in covenant with you—to know and receive your love and to give it back to all creation, to each other, and to you. Envelop us this day, surrounding us in the safety that is the knowledge that your Spirit is with us as we seek to follow the path of Christ.

So much of your world is lost this day.

People are lost to each other.

Children are lost from their parents and caregivers.

Men and women are lost in their struggle with drugs and alcohol.

Families are lost because of disagreement, unemployment, and heartbreak.

Countries are lost in the dust of war; refugees cry out in their loss of home and loss of safety. (*name current situations*)

But yet, your light shines wherever we are, searching us out as a lighthouse searches for a ship at sea. Your grace reminds us that we are worthy to be named—even if you must name and rename us so that we hear you calling to us. We are affirmed before we ask for affirmation. May we live in awe and wonder at this reality.

This day, we lift up those in our community who feel like they don’t belong: because they might not fit in with social norms at either school or work, because they are controlled by fear and anxiety, because they feel alone or judged, because they are sick or paralyzed by grief.

Enable us to be the ones who help others to hear their name being called, to receive your love, your hope, and your Spirit of Peace.

We thank you that you have given us hands that can reach out, eyes that see deep beneath the surface, ears that hear truth, mouths that speak justice, and hearts that open wide to give and receive your love. Thank you for the will to try again when we fail, when we fall, when we need to learn from you and from each other.

Send your Spirit once again to help us use these gifts for the betterment of your world and the coming of your kingdom. In the strong name of Jesus, we pray.
Amen.

Hymn

“God Be with You till We Meet Again” (VU 422)

“May God Who Creates You” (VU 454)

“Laughter Lit the Stars of Morning” (MV 190)

“May God’s Sheltering Wings” (MV 214)

Sending Forth

One: We have heard the words of the prophet: Do not fear!

All: As we go, may we go with courage!

One: We have heard the story of Jesus’ baptism.

All: As we go, may we hear our name as a gift.

Benediction

One: May God’s love and grace shine upon you.
May the Light of Jesus shine from within you.
May the joy of the Spirit shine all around you.
And may you and those you love, wherever they might be, remember who you are and to whom you belong.

Amen, Amen,
and may it be so,
this day and forever more.

Sermon: The Gift of Affirmation

On this First Sunday in Epiphany, when we mark the baptism of Jesus, let us consider what we believe about baptism.

First and foremost, baptism is about affirmation. To affirm means to state positively or assert truth—the truth about someone and about our relationship with them. To affirm is to ascribe value. Baptism is about the affirmation that there is something sacred about life and that a piece of that sacred goodness is found deep within us. It acknowledges a new beginning, as did the birth of Jesus. Now we see the instance that marks the beginning of what will be a very public ministry—his baptism, the affirmation that he is God and belongs to God, and the affirmation that we belong to God as well. We hear this affirmation in the words “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

These words affirm the life within and that it is good. When God affirms us, we can affirm others—just as when Jesus was affirmed by God so that he could do the same. When we feel affirmed, we feel as though we can be part of the community in all of its aspects, such as stewardship and discipleship. When we feel affirmation, we can give of ourselves and go deeper into our faith because we feel safe to do so.

The truth is that we all long for affirmation, but too often it seems that it comes too late...after we feel separated, after we have struggled, after we feel lost, or as if we need to prove ourselves to receive affirmation. But God’s affirmation is different. God’s affirmation is spoken—to Jesus and to us—before we earn it, before we do anything to cause it to happen, before it is solicited. Affirmation is indeed the cornerstone of grace, which becomes the cornerstone of stewardship and discipleship.

The baptism of Jesus tells us that our baptism, confirmation, and affirmation of faith are not simply about membership in a particular congregation or church (although these rites of passage which mark milestones in our lives are important for our sense of personal belonging); they also remind us that we are God’s children, regardless of age, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or any other label we humans think of as a reason either not to engage, or to exclude others from engaging.

In order to come to any sense of affirmation from this act, we must first put aside any notion we might have that baptism is about cleansing us from sins or asking for God’s forgiveness, for how can we look at a newborn baby and think that they are full of wrong? We are also not to say that those who are not baptized are damned or unworthy of God’s love. Baptism affirms the inherent worth of each of us and is a physical sign of a spiritual reality—that we belong to a loving God and that the goodness that comes from God is deep within us and serves as a communal symbol of God’s unconditional love.

In our baptism, as in the baptism of Jesus, we celebrate that we are loved—a love that comes before anything we may have done and anything we have yet to do. I suggest that baptism is about gracious blessing—a mysterious way of deeply knowing that we belong to God. God knows this, but we need something physical

to remind us of this spiritual reality. We need to remember that all we are, all we have, is welcomed by God and revealed and shared in thankful response to our belonging to God.

In baptism, this is not only personally affirmed, but is communally affirmed by those who surround us in baptism—not even Jesus was baptized in private! It was important for him to be baptized in public so that the affirmation was heard by all who were present.

Through this, then, we can use baptism as an opportunity to affirm one another. Before we are asked to, before a good action is done, before we have been able to form a judgment on whether or not it is deserved, we can affirm each other, because God has already affirmed us. And when we are blessed to be in the presence of one who is being baptized, we remember our own goodness and we recall that God affirms us every morning that we open our eyes and see the goodness that is God's world.

And so, today, we are challenged to think about what we believe about baptism. How does it shape our understanding of being a community in relationship with God and being intentionally welcoming? How can we create opportunities, as a baptizing community, to affirm each other? How does baptism lead us into generosity and discipleship?

In the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, which follows the journey of three escaped convicts, there is a scene where baptisms are taking place in a river. The men who have broken out of prison figure that they've done so much wrong in their lives that baptism will give them a new beginning—and so they are immersed in the water. But I think what they really do is to affirm the goodness in one another so that they can continue on their journey toward wholeness—the act of baptism doesn't make them perfect, but opens them up to the goodness that is within them and around them. It calls them to discipleship. It calls them to offer their gifts to the world, even if those gifts aren't always understood or received well. The song that is sung during this scene, "Down to the River to Pray," is an invitation to walk with God and to invite others to that journey of stewardship and discipleship that has the power to transform people and systems. As a baptizing church, loved and affirmed by God, we, too, are called to that journey of stewardship and discipleship, to generously share what we have, in gratitude to God. May it be so.

Amen.

Video clip: *O Brother Where Art Thou: Down in the River to Pray* (youtu.be/82_bhDO_Trw). **Note: Faith communities must have the proper licensing to show this or any other copyrighted video during worship or another gathering.**

b. Loving Our Neighbours: Worship for Five Sundays of Lent

Loving Our Neighbours: Worship for Five Sundays of Lent invites congregants to engage in Lenten practices that will guide them in sharing their gifts with the wider community.

- We begin on Sunday 1 with the Lenten practice of naming values to which we say “Yes!”
- On Sunday 2 we focus on how our blessings can be a blessing to others.
- Sunday 3 is about the stewardship of our time and the practice of regular worship.
- Sunday 4 includes the invitation to be generous and to be intentional in our gift giving.
- On Sunday 5 we engage in the practice of hope; we offer gratitude and celebrate.

Each Sunday, the service opens with an introduction that helps worshippers appreciate the purpose of the *Called to Be the Church* program while also preparing them for these Lenten practices.

Worship liturgies were prepared by the Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, with reflections by the Rev. Dave Jagger, a member of the Philanthropy Unit Team. The children’s programs were prepared by Jen Auger, designated lay minister for families, children, and youth at Melville United Church in Fergus, Ontario.

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

Program: united-church.ca/stewardship

Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship

Sunday 1

How to Say No!

Introduction to Lenten Practices and Called to Be the Church

(This introduction is used each week as there may be people who have not been present for a previous week of the program. Modify this introduction as you see fit. Build in time for exploring the experience of the spiritual practices. These could also be compiled and shared in various ways—in the bulletin, on the website, etc.)

Congratulations! Our congregation has chosen the five weeks of Lent this year to be part of the growing number of United Church congregations across Canada using *Called to Be the Church*. The liturgy today and for the next four Sundays was prepared by our Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Richard Bott. The reflections were written by the Rev. Dave Jagger.

Called to Be the Church is so much more than the United Church's congregational giving program. Using *Called to Be the Church* is a clear indication that your congregation cares about you. We want you to grow in faith and be closer to God and we're not willing to leave that to chance.

We know that growing in the Way of Jesus takes intentionality. It's not a spectator sport. You have to do it. So, over the coming weeks of Lent, we will inspire each other; we will invite each other deeper into faith; and we will give thanks for all God is doing in us and through us as, each week, we explore a different Lenten practice.

So what is a Lenten practice? A Lenten practice is anything we do, during Lent, that opens us up and brings us closer into God's presence. A Lenten practice is like going to the gym for your faith. It may be awkward at first and difficult, but afterwards you feel good; and after doing it for a while, you notice changes and strengths, and it becomes so much a part of your routine that you can't imagine life without it. Some common and traditional Lenten practices include prayer, fasting, generosity, confession, Bible study, hospitality, working for justice, and meditation.

The Lenten discipleship practices that we will explore are each tied to the Christian values of generosity, thankfulness, and stewardship. Each week, not only will we learn about a specific Lenten practice, but you will be given ideas about different ways that you can actually do it. Try it; play with it; see how it opens you up to God. By taking this opportunity and trying each practice, you will be making space in your life to actively live out the Way of Jesus. We think that's really exciting, and it's great that we're on this Lenten journey together!

So let's begin.

Find the complete 5-week worship series at **united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship**.

Prelude

Welcome

One: In Jesus' name, welcome!
First-time participant or one who's been here many days;
child or elder or somewhere in-between;
stewards, caretakers, disciples, children of God—
neighbours all, loved and loving.
Welcome. Welcome in Christ's name!

Recognition of the Land and Indigenous People(s)

A Time for Silent Reflection

Call to Worship

One: As we travel this Lenten pathway,
we journey together, a community of faith.

**All: As we travel this Way of Jesus,
we journey together, but also alone.**

One: Practising our faith:

**All: living Christ's call
to love God with all that we are,
to love our neighbour
as we love ourselves.**

One: Practising our faith:

All: as stewards on the Way.

Opening Prayer

**All: God of the hungry times,
God of the difficult times,
God of all the times of our lives,
we need to talk.
Sometimes it's difficult to understand
the direction we need to go.
With all the choices we have in our lives,
sometimes we're not sure
when to say "Yes,"
or when to say "No."
So we ask for your guidance.
We ask for wisdom.**

**We ask for Spirit.
In our worship, in our work,
in our choices, in our lives.
May it be so, loving God!
Amen.**

Hymn

“Forty Days and Forty Nights” (*Voices United* (VU) 114) or “Come Touch Our Hearts” (*More Voices* (MV) 12)

Children’s Program *(See p. 28.)*

Scripture

Matthew 4:1–11

(Consider sharing the scripture as readers’ theatre (people reading dramatically) or invite people to prepare it as a drama as follows. Three voices are needed.)

Narrator: After his baptism, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the Tempter.
Jesus fasted for a long, long time—
forty days and nights—
and, by the end of it, he was painfully hungry.
At that point, the Tempter came to him.

Tempter: If you are the Son of God,
tell these stones to become...hmm...loaves of bread!

Jesus: No!
It is written in the Torah, “One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Narrator: So the Tempter took Jesus to the holy city
and sat beside him on the highest part of the Temple, the absolute top.

Tempter: If you are the Son of God, jump!
Throw yourself to the ground,
for *(sounding reasonable)*, as it is written in the Torah,
“[God] will command God’s angels for you,” and
“They will gather you up in their hands,
so you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

Jesus: No! Again, it is written,
“Do not put Adonai, do not put God, to the test!”

Narrator: So, this time, the Tempter took Jesus to a very high mountain from which they could see all the kingdoms, all the nations, all the places of the world, in all of their greatness. As they looked down, the Tempter spoke again.

Tempter: I will give you all of this. I will give you all of this. You only need to do one thing. Bow down. Bow down and worship me.

Jesus: No. No! NO!
Go away, Adversary. Go away.
It is written,
“There is only one you will worship,
only one you will serve—
the Lord your God!”
Go away!

Narrator: And, right then, the Tempter left Jesus. Suddenly, God’s Holy Messengers appeared, and Jesus was cared for.

Reflection

How to Say No! (*See p. 26.*)

Hymn

“How Firm a Foundation” (VU 660) or “When We Are Tested” (MV 65)

Work of the People

Announcements and a Minute for Mission

(*Search “Stories of Our Mission” at united-church.ca.*)

The Offering

Invitation

One: The Way of Lent is a path that we travel each year, as a time for us to remember Jesus’ journey. On that journey he met many people. He laughed with them, he cried with them, he taught them, and he learned from them. But, most of all, he loved them, not just with his words, but with his actions.

Jesus taught his followers that they were to love one another as he had loved them. Our offering is one way to do that, to share the work of our hands and hearts through our dollars and cents. As you share what you are able, you support the ministry here, and the ministry of The United Church of Canada through Mission & Service. Let us celebrate what God has given, and what we have to share.

Hymn

“Though I May Speak” (VU 372) or “You Are Holy” (MV 45)

Prayer

**All: We do not live on bread alone,
but by your Word, loving God.
May that Word fill our hearts and our hands,
all that we have, and all that we are,
that it may be a blessing in your world.
In Jesus’ name, we ask it.
Amen.**

(Some congregations might commission their Giving Team at this point in the liturgy. See p. 60.)

Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer

One: Loving God,
we thank you for the journey of our lives,
with its ups and downs,
with its questions and challenges,
and with its moments of joy.
We thank you for the beauty around us,
for the hills and the trees,
for the water and the weather,
for all that reminds us of life,
and life made new.
Today, we are especially thankful for..
(Thanksgivings of the community and/or from current events)
In the quiet of this place,
we offer you our own celebrations.

(A time for silent prayer)

Even as we say “Thank you,”
we realize that there is brokenness in us
and in our world.
We realize that we have not always lived the love
to which you call us.
Sometimes by action or by inaction,
sometimes by just going along with things,
we have broken faith with each other,
and with you.
We offer to you, our brokenness, loving God,
not only asking that we would be forgiven,
but that, by your love, we would be made whole,
living in new ways, living out Christ’s love.
Receive the prayers of our hearts, God.

(A time for silent prayer)

Knowing that we are forgiven,
knowing that we are loved,
we turn to the world, to love it into wholeness.
We pray for people living in desert times in their lives,
people who are facing famine—of body or spirit,
people who are tempted to turn away from what is right and just;
and we pray for a world, all creatures, all places,
facing destruction.
We remember especially...
(Name concerns of the congregation, or from current events.)
We pray for healing and wholeness,
and we ask that we would be a part of the solution,
loving God,
turning our prayer from words to actions.
Bless our journey, we pray,
sharing the words that Jesus gave all his disciples...

The Lord’s Prayer

(Use a version of The Lord’s Prayer that is appropriate for your community of faith.)

Amen.

Hymn

“God Be with You till We Meet Again” (VU 422) or “As Long As We Follow” (MV 140)

Benediction and Commissioning

One: As we travel this Lenten pathway,
we journey together, a community of faith.

**All: As we travel this Way of Jesus,
we journey together, but also alone.**

One: Let us go into God’s world,
practising our faith,

**All: living Christ’s call
to love God with all that we are,
to love our neighbour
as we love ourselves.**

One: Let us go into God’s world

**All: knowing we are never alone.
Christ’s peace, the Creator’s love,
and the breath of the Holy Spirit go with us.
Amen!**

Reflection: How to Say No!

I find it funny that one of the first words we learn to speak and use as small children becomes for many of us the hardest word to use as our life progresses. Spend any time around a two-year-old and you will know how often they use the word “no.”

“Please eat your peas.” “No!”

“It’s time for bed.” “No!”

“Did you break the lamp?” “No!”

“Do you want to go for a walk?” “No!”

They are very good at saying, “No!” For many of us, however, you’d think we’d never heard the word before: “I know you’re already serving communion this morning, reading scripture, ushering, and teaching Sunday school, but we need someone to run the tech equipment. Could you do it?” “Yes.” “I know you worked all day and have two church meetings tonight, but I need help with my homework...and can I have a dozen cupcakes for school tomorrow?” “Yes.”

Does any of that sound familiar? We have become so good at saying “Yes” and so poor at saying “No” that we are exhausted, overworked, burned-out, and spiritually depleted. How can I hear God speaking to me, and why would I want to, if all it means is more work? Even this idea of Lenten practices just sounds like more work. Right?

So maybe it’s time to regain the practice of saying “No,” not indiscriminately or selfishly like that two-year-old, but wisely and intentionally like a follower of Jesus. It means saying “No” not just because I don’t want to, or because it’s too hard, or too new, or it scares me, but saying, “No” to this because I have already said “Yes” to that.

We are given a great example of how this works in today’s Bible reading from Matthew’s gospel (4:1–11). Three times Jesus has to make a choice. Three times he can either say “No” or “Yes.”

“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread!”
“No” or “Yes”?

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the highest point of the Temple.” “No” or “Yes”?

“All these...kingdoms and all their wealth and power I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” “No” or “Yes”?

Each time Jesus says “No!” on account of that to which he has already said “Yes!”
“Yes, I will trust God to provide what I really need.”

“Yes, I will trust God to care for me.”

“Yes, I will serve and worship God alone.”

Now, probably, hopefully, you’re not going to be asked this week to throw yourself off a roof, or intentionally starve yourself, or turn your back on God or the church, as Jesus was. However, you are going to be faced with choices and temptations of your own.

Every time you pick up your phone—I just want to check Facebook, or Instagram, or my work e-mail, or level up in Candy Crush—the people around you cease to exist.

Every time you open your wallet—cash? debit? credit?—you spend more because a strong economy is what really matters, and it will make you feel good.

As those who follow Jesus, each of us, constantly, gets to choose “No” or “Yes.” How will I use the time and resources I have been given? That’s a stewardship question.

So here’s our first Lenten practice. Early this week, maybe tomorrow, I want you to make a list of three things, three Christian values, to which you have said “Yes.” Maybe they are similar to the three that Jesus relies on in the Bible story:

“Yes, I will trust God to provide what I really need.”

“Yes, I will trust God to care for me.”

“Yes, I will serve and worship God alone.”

Maybe they’re broader:

“Yes, I value faithfulness.”

“Yes, I value kindness.”

“Yes, I value generosity.”

Think about it and pray about it and write down three things, three Christian values, to which you have said “Yes.” Carry that list with you as a reminder. Make a copy or two and put them in places where you will keep running into them. Then, through the rest of the week, whenever a choice presents itself, say “No” when it contradicts your list—those Christian values to which you have said “Yes.”

Then come back next week ready to share a brief story of how this Lenten practice worked for you and how it helped (or didn’t help) open you up to God as you made space in your life to actively live out the Way of Jesus.

Amen.

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

Program: united-church.ca/stewardship

Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship

Children's Program

Welcome and Check-in

Gather all ages together, preferably in a circle where all participants can see one another. Check in with a warm welcome and invite each person to share what is new since they were last together. Make sure everyone's name is known in the circle. If you have a practice of collecting an offering from the participants, include that practice as part of your welcome.

Story

The Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11)

Begin by sharing that this story was told about Jesus many years ago. It was told as a way of showing how Jesus chose God's way of love instead of worldly power and wealth, and that these choices are what set him apart from others.

Option 1: Tell a story version of the scripture, e.g., from *Family Story Bible* by Ralph Milton or *The Spark Story Bible*. Use pictures to help illustrate the narrative.

Option 2: Have three youth read the scripture from the liturgy using readers' theatre as a dramatic device. (One person takes the part of narrator.)

Conversation Starters

1. Which part of the story do you like the most?
2. Which of the choices do you think would have been most difficult for Jesus to make?
3. What might have helped Jesus make his choices?
4. Is there a part of the story you would change?

Playing with the Story

To go deeper into the story, invite participants to choose from the following activities. All activities can be adapted for different age groups. Whenever possible, encourage older youth to assist younger participants with tasks that require fine motor skills.

Paper Choice Maker

This fun toy, also known as a Paper Fortune Teller, Whirlybird, or Paku Paku, uses the art of origami. The game presents players with a series of choices that lead to one of eight hidden outcomes hidden inside the flaps of the choice maker. Use the game to explore how we make choices.

1. Give each participant a copy of Paper Choice Maker, Template 1 (*see p. 32*) and review the choices on the template.

2. Invite participants to colour their templates, but to leave the four corner squares to be coloured later. Ask them to cut out the templates following along the solid lines.
3. Fold the paper into fourths; unfold the paper.
4. Fold each of the four corners, evenly, into the middle. Fold into fourths again. Flip over the paper.
5. Fold over the corners on the new side of the paper. Fold into fourths one last time.
6. Add a different colour to each of the four corners that have not been coloured. Fit fingers into the slits and open! (*There are several websites which can help you with detailed instructions on the folding of the Paper Choice Maker.*)
7. Invite the participants to play with each other, exploring how different choices lead to different outcomes.

How to Play

Work in pairs (or in groups if numbers and/or ages make working in pairs difficult).

1. Have one player choose one of the colours on the choice maker. Together, spell out the name of the colour as the other person holding the choice maker moves it back and forth.
2. The first player then selects a number from the inside, and the person holding the choice maker moves it as many times.
3. The first player selects a new number. The second player opens the flap of the number chosen.
4. The first player then has to fulfill the action identified under the flap selected.

Alternative Print a copy of Paper Choice Maker, Template 2 (*see p. 33*) for each participant. Have participants brainstorm as a group or as individuals different outcomes to include on their templates. Encourage them to come up with positive and encouraging outcomes. Have participants fill in the outcome boxes with their choice of outcomes, decorate the template, then cut it out and fold it.

Conversation Starters

1. How did you choose which options to select when playing with the paper choice maker?
2. Were there any outcomes you tried to avoid?
3. If you could change some of the outcomes, what would you change?

Crazy Cookies

Using pre-prepared cookie dough, participants will make individually flavoured cookies. Each participant will make two cookies. With the first cookie, they add whatever additional ingredients they like, but for the second cookie they will be limited to two added ingredients. Explore with the participants how they might go about choosing what they include in their cookies, what they choose to exclude, and how having limited choices might affect their decisions.

1. Make the basic dough the day before and keep it in the fridge. Find the recipe at biggerbolderbaking.com/crazy-cookie-dough (makes enough for about 40 cookies).
2. Bring several different ingredients for participants to choose from, e.g., chocolate chips, coconut, oatmeal, raisins/dried fruits, sprinkles, marshmallows, cocoa powder, caramel candies, cookie chunks.
3. Provide each participant with two balls of dough and a small plate or bowl to contain their chosen ingredients.
4. For the first ball, instruct participants to choose whatever they want to add to their cookie. Encourage restraint in the amount of added ingredients (so that the cookies do not fall apart), but allow a fair bit of freedom and experimentation.
5. For the second ball of dough, instruct participants to choose only two ingredients to add to their cookie. Again, encourage restraint in the amount of those two ingredients.
6. Bake cookies* for 10 minutes at 375°F.

**Identifying whose cookies belong to whom can be challenging after they are baked because they do spread. Use parchment paper on your baking sheets so that you can write names or numbers on the paper next to each cookie before they are baked.*

Conversation Starters

1. How did you choose which ingredients to add to your cookies?
2. How did you change your strategy when you could only choose two ingredients?
3. If you could make another cookie, what choices would you keep the same? What would you change?

Free Play

Sharing a story and beginning the process of pondering through organized activities will work for some participants. Others will need time for reflection in their own space. Provide a quiet area with toys and activities such as Lego/blocks, Little People/animal figures, cars, colouring/activity sheets, puzzles, easy board games, e.g., Connect Four, Tic Tac Toe, Snakes and Ladders. Offering

a selection of self-guided activities is a great way to create space for those who need more independent time. Gently monitor the Free Play zone and engage those participating in this area with questions about how they selected a specific toy or activity.

Reading Corner

Children's books that explore the same themes as this week's children's program include:

1. *The Bad Seed* by Jory John
2. *Whoa Jealousy!* by Woodleigh Marx Hubbard

If you cannot find the books at the library and do not wish to purchase them, you will find many children's books read aloud on YouTube.

Wrapping Up the Story

Regather in a circle and take a few moments to check in with participants:

1. What did participants enjoy about their activities today?
2. Was there anything challenging about their activities?

Make connections between the participants' experiences during the activities or free play and the earlier wonderings about the story. How do their experiences in making choices tie in with Jesus' challenges around choices? Is there anything they can learn from Jesus to help them make choices in the future?

Blessing Chain

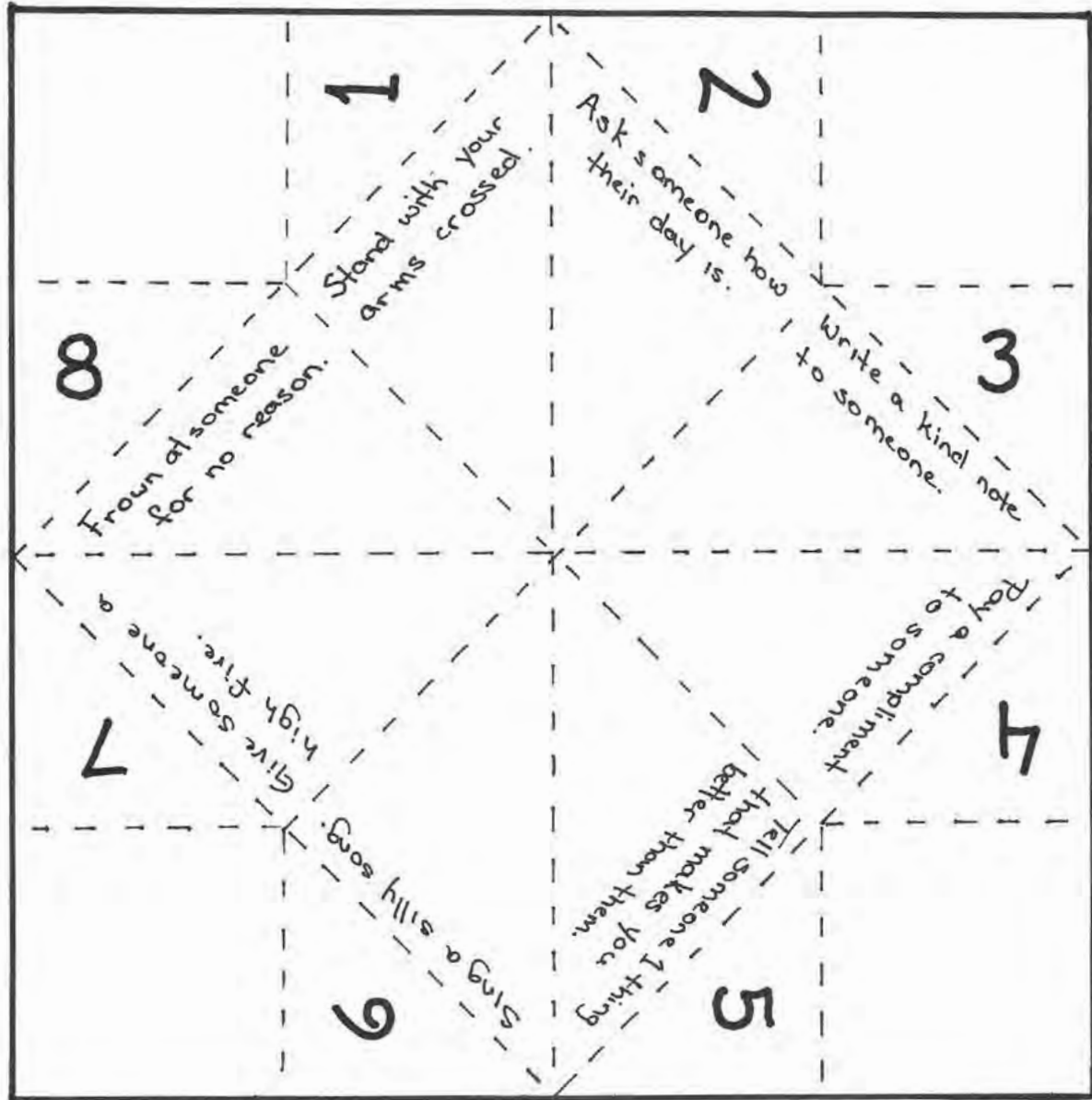
Together, create a chain of blessings, adding to it each week throughout Lent. You might use the blessing chain to hang over your cross on Easter morning. Paper chains are created by taking a slip of paper and taping/stapling it to form a link. The next slip of paper is threaded into the first link, then taped/stapled to form a new link.

1. Ahead of time cut 2"x11" strips of differently coloured paper.
2. Provide each person with a strip.
3. Invite each participant to write something they are grateful for on the slip of paper. It could be a person, a thing, something that has happened to them, or something they see around them. (Encourage older participants to help the younger children.)
4. Go around the circle and have each person share what they are thankful for, then turn the slip of paper into a link in the paper chain.

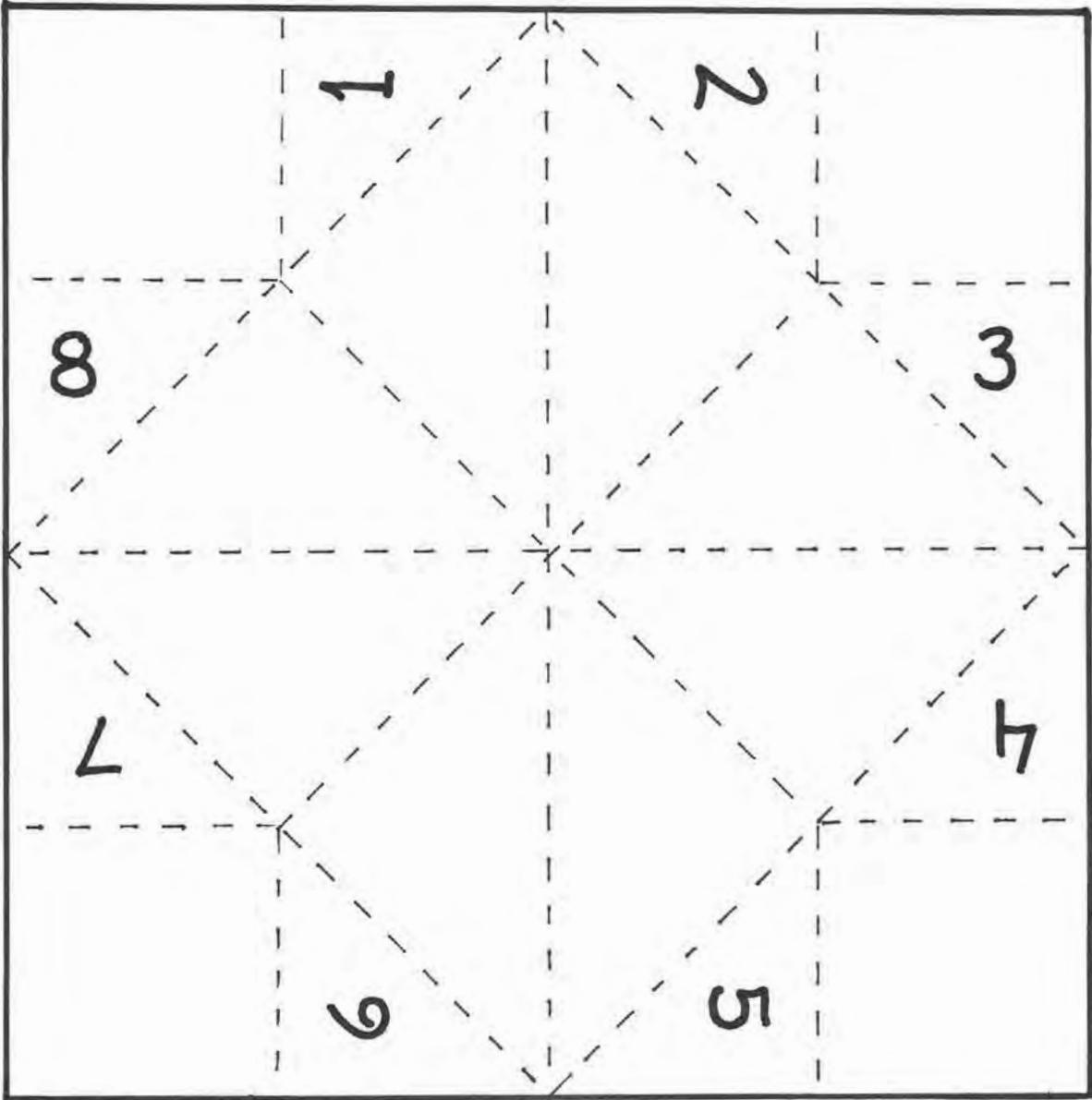
Alternative: If you have a very small group, you might invite participants to create more than one link to enable the chain to grow a little faster.

Close the Blessing Chain time by having everyone yell together "Thank you, God!"

Paper Choice Maker, Template 1



Paper Choice Maker, Template 2



c. The Early Church in Eastertide: Worship for Five Sundays after Easter

Called to Be the Church is the United Church's giving program, but it's so much more than that. It reminds us of who we are as Christians and what lies at the core of our communities of faith—things like awe and wonder, togetherness and community, enough for all, the glad breaking of bread, and praising God.

These are things we see modelled for us in the Early Church as recounted to us in chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles.

Over five weeks (the five weeks after Easter), we will dive into some of the stories from Acts, as well as some of Jesus' stories of the Kingdom of God, and see what they have to teach us, or remind us, about what it means to be a community of faith.

If you have been a part of this worship community for a long time, *Called to Be the Church – The Early Church in Eastertide* might be like looking through an old photo album, looking back on younger (but not necessarily simpler) days. Scripture reminds us of who and whose we are, and the hopes God has for us—to flourish and serve as God's hands and feet in the world.

If you are new to your worship community, perhaps *The Early Church in Eastertide* might be an invitation into fuller participation in the kind of dynamic and Spirit-filled togetherness you've been longing for. All throughout Acts, we see the Spirit adding to the community those who feel compelled by God's vision of wholeness and peace.

Whether our community is big or small, young or old, urban or rural or digital, or a mixture of all the above, we are all called as Christians to form the kinds of communities that are faithful to God's Word and engaged in God's mission.

These resources were prepared by Andrew Hyde, designated lay minister and chaplain for the Ecumenical Campus Ministry (Anglican, Presbyterian, United) at the University of Guelph and Lisa Leffler, a diaconal ministry student at the Centre for Christian Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba, undertaking a field placement with the Ecumenical Campus Ministry (Anglican, Presbyterian, United) at the University of Guelph.

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

Program: united-church.ca/stewardship

Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship

Sunday 1

Awe and Wonder

Welcome

Recognition of the Land and Indigenous People(s)

Lighting of the Christ Candle

One: Jesus came to share the good news of God. He came to share in our joys and sorrows so we may know God more fully. Let us take a moment to share our joys and sorrows in community with God's people.

(The congregation is invited to share stories about exciting or challenging events in their lives.)

One: We light this candle for the good news we shared, the good news in our hearts, and the good news that wherever we go, God is with us.

Call to Worship (based on Acts 2:43-47)

One: We are called to be the church.

All: We come to learn from the lessons Jesus taught.

One: Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

All: We come in amazement of the wondrous things God is doing in the world.

One: All who believed were together and had all things in common.

All: We come with our own unique stories and histories, drawn together in God's love.

One: They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

All: We come to learn ways we can care for God's people and creation.

One: Day by day, as they spent much time together in the Temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

All: We come to share in fellowship as God's people.

One: And day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

All: We come to worship God together in community.

Find the complete 5-week worship series at **united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship**.

Opening Prayer

Holy God, as we gather today as your people, make us attentive to your call in our lives. Help us to notice the things you do among us, the things you stir in our hearts, the opportunities that surround us to share your love with others. Guide us in this time of worship, we pray. Amen.

Hymn

“Filled with the Spirit’s Power” (*Voices United* 194) or “Will You Come and Follow Me” (VU 567)

Prayer of Confession

All: Holy God, we live in a world full of distractions. We are captivated and consumed with things that do not matter, often at the expense of hearing your call. Forgive us, we pray. Gracious God, hear our silent prayers as we confess those things that separate us from you and from each other....

(silence)

Words of Assurance

One: When we come before God, seeking forgiveness as our truest and most honest selves, we are met with mercy and grace. Know that you are forgiven from your sin. God still has things to show you and continues to call you by name.

Gospel Reading

The parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31, 32)

Hymn

“Your Love Is Amazing” (*More Voices* 26) or “This Is God’s Wondrous World” (VU 296)

Children’s Time

(Play a game of “I spy” with the children. Help them notice different, interesting things in your worship space. Share how God is doing amazing things around us every day, if only we have a willingness to take notice.)

or

Conversation Time

(Invite worshippers to turn to a neighbour and discuss the following questions: “What does it take to get your attention?” “What takes up more of your attention than you’d like?”)

or

Testimony Time

(Invite someone from your community of faith to tell a story about their experience of being called by God to pursue something or take something on.)

Children’s Program *(See p. 42.)*

Lord’s Prayer

Responsive Psalm

Psalm 111 (VU p. 833)

Hymn

“Teach Me, God, to Wonder” (VU 299) or “Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works” (VU 308)

New Testament Lesson

The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1–19)

Message

Awe and Wonder *(See p. 39.)*

Offering Our Gifts

Offering Song

“In Gratitude and Humble Trust” (VU 544) or “What Can I Do?” (MV 191)

Offering Prayer

One: Holy Creator, we offer these gifts to you. May they serve all your people and help us come together in a community of your love. Amen.

Prayers of the People

One: God of the universe, creator of galaxies and rivers and trees, author of hope and giver of peace, there is no end to the amazing things you have done.

Help us to take it all in. Help us to learn from the stories of others.
Help us to notice your presence all around us.

Holy God, you call out to us in many ways.

Make us aware of all the places where you are calling us to serve and to give of ourselves—in areas grand and humble, in forums global and local—and give us a desire to contribute in helpful ways.

Compassionate God, there are many people and situations that weigh on our hearts:

people who are sick in body or mind and need healing,
people who are persecuted and oppressed by systems of injustice,
cherished children of the living God who feel alone and unworthy of love.
In this time of quiet silence, we lift them up to you, Lord.

(silence)

Hear our prayers, O God, and attend to them in your loving mercy.
We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

Hymn

“I Can Feel You Near Me God” (MV 48) or “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (VU 220)

Sending Out and Blessing

One: Go from this place to be God’s noticing people, attuned to the movements and workings of the Spirit around us. Let awe and wonder be your starting point and the blessing of God be your guide. Amen.

Choral Closing

“May the God of Hope Go with Us” (VU 424) v. 2 or “Go to the World” (VU 420) v. 1

Message: Awe and Wonder

“We are called to be the church.”

This statement from A New Creed of The United Church of Canada is daring. It is challenging. And like the other affirmations it accompanies about living in God’s world and believing and trusting in God, it packs with it some important questions that we, as a community of faith, are going to be wrestling with over the coming weeks.

Who is “we”?

What does it mean to be “called”?

What kind of church are we called to become?

When communities like ours try to flesh out who they are called to be, they can be guided by the subsequent lines of A New Creed, lines that speak to things like celebrating God’s presence, living with respect in creation, loving and serving others, and proclaiming Jesus. But more often than not, people are drawn to emulate an example, to model themselves on the concrete experiences of others. So we might ask:

- Are we called to be the church as we were 60 years ago, the church we remember from our youth?
- Are we called to be the big budget church we see across town, or on TV, or the Internet, with their mega programs and staff teams and professional branding?
- Are we called to be the church that does everything, that meets the needs and responds to the aspirations of every person who comes through our door, or are we called to be the church that does a few select things really well?

In looking for examples to follow, there is no shortage of communities of faith that get it right, and an equal number of stories of churches that get it wrong, and the vast majority of examples are some messy and confusing combination of the two. That’s why many, when looking for a church community to emulate and learn from, go back to the Early Church as described to us in the Book of Acts.

We might be drawn to the Early Church because of its proximity to the life and times of Jesus; some of the Early Church figures actually walked with Jesus and learned from his teaching and example.

We might be drawn to the Early Church because of its situation as a pre-Christendom example of following Jesus; it comes from a time before church and empire became co-mingled and better reflects our reality in a post-Christendom world.

We might be drawn to the Early Church because it was a smaller and easier movement to wrap our heads around. It was before things like denominations and traditions made the church branch out into a complex and dysfunctional family tree.

Or we might be drawn to the Early Church simply because of the compelling picture it paints for us of what it means to be followers of Jesus. The second chapter of Acts gives us the most concise picture of what that Early Church was like. It tells us that:

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:43–47).

What a compelling picture of what it means to be the church! It is this depiction of the Early Church, and a few of the stories that surround it, that will guide us over the coming weeks as we explore what it means to be “called to be the church.”

For many of us, the stories of the Early Church are compelling because they take us back to a time when the church was young. When trying to reconnect with our values and ideals, it is common to recall significant moments from our youth—those first experiences of having our gifts recognized by others, or articulating a passion for a particular line of work, or falling in love, or recognizing a problem in the world that we wanted to commit our life toward solving. Sometimes as we age and accrue experiences in this less than ideal world, we lose track of the idealism of our youth and become cynical about the world and our place and possibilities within it.

For some, the stories and examples of the Early Church are best envisioned as the experiences of a young church, a church that was still idealistic and visionary and believed amazing things were possible for those who live in God’s world.

If you take the time to listen to the young people in our community, or visit the closest campus ministry supported by our church, or if you just think back to your own experience of being young, you’ll likely recognize or remember that being young does not mean life is simple or easy. The challenges may look different from age to age, but the experience of being young has always been challenging. The same can be said of when the church was young, too. The Book of Acts is full of friction and messiness and challenges.

But a common characteristic of the young is their propensity for awe and wonder. Just think of a newborn opening their eyes for the first time, trying to make sense of shapes and colours. Imagine a toddler tasting foods for the first time and responding to what they like and don’t like. Picture a child exploring the world around them—wondering at grasshoppers, crawfish, and spider webs—or a young student riding a bus to school for the first time. Even the big kids who arrive at a university for orientation week can’t help but exhibit the qualities of awe and wonder as they take in new experiences and surroundings.

This is where our depiction of the Early Church begins. “Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done” (Acts 2:43). The foundation of a life of faith, and the core of any community of faith, is the awe and wonder we exhibit when we take time to notice the things God is doing around us.

There is a lot to take in. From the big, loud, and miraculous, as witnessed by Saul and the community at Damascus, when a life is changed in a moment and an enemy becomes a friend, to the small, quiet, and seemingly ordinary, as when a little mustard seed grows and becomes a home for others. God is providing signs and wonders all around us every day, if only we take the time to notice.

We as the church are called to be a noticing people. Noticing requires slowing down and rejecting the breakneck pace of society. It means seeing with new eyes and considering the perspectives of others, including the Divine. It means putting ourselves in situations that are new and uncomfortable, that are risky and full of potential. Noticing the big and small movements of God means seeing with the heart and imagination and faith, just as much as with the eyes and other senses.

A common description of worship is that worship is anything we do in response to the things God has already done. Worship, therefore, begins with noticing, observing, and taking in the things God is doing in the world.

As we begin this exploration of what it means to be “called to be the church,” may we begin by noticing the works of the Almighty around us. May our noticing draw forth from us awe and wonder. And may our awe and wonder take us back to a place where we believed anything was possible for those who live in God’s world. For it is this kind of hopeful imagination we will need if we are to be the church God calls us to be.

Amen.

Children's Program

The lessons that are included with the *The Early Church in Eastertide* program can be used in a variety of settings. You may be in a situation to use them as part of a one-room children's program for all ages. You may choose to use them as part of a summer program or March Break camp. Or you might incorporate them into a Messy Church program or other family-based activity.

Each session includes a small opening and closing prayer. If you have your own opening and closing rituals, modify this program as you see fit.

Each session is based on the Gospel reading that is part of the worship liturgy for the week. These are five lessons from Jesus on the importance of giving and generosity and being the church together—the Parables of the Mustard Seed, Good Samaritan, and Great Banquet, as well as the Widow's Offering and the Sending of the Seventy Helpers. Each session invites a retelling of the Gospel story and gives some suggestions on how to do that.

Each session also includes suggestions for four types of learning activities—something science-based, something artistic, something food-related, and something active. Depending on your context and the interests of your children and volunteers, you may choose to offer anywhere from one to all four of these activities in your time together. For instance, if your children's program on a Sunday morning consists of just a few children, you may choose to offer only one of these options. But if you're using this as part of a Messy Church program, you may want to offer all four options, allowing participants to select their activities.

There are lots of great resources, recipes, and ideas available online, so each of the options provided here is simply meant to inspire you or point you in the direction of other ideas. Feel free to modify, improve, and fill in any gaps using the resources you know and trust.

Many children's programs include a music component. You might be used to learning a song together and performing fun actions to the music. You may enjoy presenting a song for your community of faith. Or you may find value in having music playing in the background while your young ones engage with their activities and learning.

Check out the album *My Money Talks* by Bryan Moyer Suderman. It's fun to listen to and to sing along with, and touches on many of the themes lifted up in *Called to Be the Church*. Visit smalltallministries.com/music/recordings/my-money-talks/ to find out how to download a copy or order sheet music.

Our young people are an important part of the church we are called to become. They have much to offer, they have wisdom to share, and they are of infinite value to God. Thank you for making space for them, for valuing them and their spiritual development, and for investing your own time and energy in this important part of the church.

Sunday 1: Awe and Wonder

Opening Prayer

God, we gather today to learn more about the stories of Jesus.
Help us to notice all the wonderful things you do
that surround us every day.
Open our hearts to your amazing love. Amen.

Retell the Story

(Retell the story of the Parable of the Mustard Seed found in Matthew 13:31–32 by reading from a children's Bible, by having the children act out the story together, or by asking questions about the scripture read in church.)

Sample Questions

- What is the smallest thing you can think of? What makes it special?
- Sometimes, small things grow into big things. Can you name some things that grow really big?
- How are you growing? What's something you couldn't do before that you now find easy?
- How might a community of people grow? How is our church community growing?

Activity Options

Science Activity: Planting Seeds of Hope

Materials: Ceramic plant pots, potting soil, various seed packages, decorations (e.g., stickers, paint, markers)

Instructions: Invite the children to plant some seeds in a ceramic pot. Fill the pot with soil. Choose and plant seeds. Add water. If time allows, invite children to decorate their pots.

The children might take the planted seeds home or leave them at the church for observation.

Discuss: Planting a seed is an act of faith. We hope it will grow into a healthy plant, but it doesn't happen right away. We have to wait and hope, and we never know for sure until we see it come up out of the soil. Can you remember a time when you had to wait for something special? What did it feel like? What hopes do you think others have for us as we grow into the people we are becoming? What hopes do you have for our community and our church as it grows into what it is becoming?

Art Activity: Handprint Bushes

Materials: Different shades of construction paper, pencils, markers, scissors, glue or tape, Bristol board

Instructions: In our story, the mustard seed grows into a lovely bush that becomes a home for the birds. Invite the children to create their own bush. Trace around each child's hands and cut out the handprints. Invite each child to write their name on their handprint, along with something about them that makes them special. Wrap the finger ends of the handprints around a pencil to give them some curl. Gather the handprints and glue or tape them to the Bristol board in the form of a bush. If time allows, create some finishing touches (branches, birds, nests) out of construction paper and add them to your bush. Think of a slogan for your bush poster and write it on your Bristol board (e.g., St. Paul's United Church—Called to be a home for others).

Discuss: A church community needs to feel like a safe place in order to be a home for others. What do you like about your home? What would you wish to be different? How can we make our church feel like a safe place, a home, for lots of different people?

Food Activity: Feed My Birds

Materials: Large pinecones, birdseed, shortening, cornmeal, yarn

Instructions: Invite the children to make a pinecone birdfeeder. First, tie a piece of arm's length yarn around the end of a pinecone. Roll the pinecone in a mixture of cornmeal and shortening, making sure to get the mixture in all of the cracks and crevices. Next, roll your goopy pinecone in a tub of birdseed, sticking as much birdseed as you can to the pinecone. To finish, either hang your birdfeeder somewhere outside the church or put it in a plastic bag to take home.

Discuss: In order to grow properly, we all need to be fed healthy and nutritious things. What are your favourite healthy foods? What foods help your body grow and what kinds of things aren't as healthy for you? What if we are trying to grow not only our bodies, but also our minds and our hearts? What do we need to be fed if we are to grow spiritually?

Action Activity: Nature Walk

Materials: Nature books for identifying trees, birds, insects, and so on; camera; audio recorder; sketch pads and pencils

Instructions: Lead the children to a green area outside or near your church. Invite them to spend some time noticing all the beautiful things God has placed in that space. See if they can identify some of the trees, birds, or insects they see. Invite them to take some nature photographs or capture an audio recording of nature sounds. Make available materials to draw what they see. Depending on the group of children you have, you may give them freedom to explore the space on their own or in pairs, or you may remain as a group and notice things together.

Discuss: God is doing amazing things around us, each and every day. But we don't always notice because we're often too busy or moving too quickly. When we take the time to notice, we can be amazed not only by the big things God does, but also by the little things. How might you make more time to notice the things God does? How might we encourage others to slow down and notice as well?

Closing Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for all the ways you grow good things—in us, around us, and in our community.

(Invite each child to share about something or someone they are thankful for. You may pass around a sharing stone or other significant object to signify whose turn it is. Praying in silence and/or passing the object without sharing is always an option.)

For all these amazing and wonderful things, we give you thanks, O God. Amen.

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

Program: united-church.ca/stewardship

Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship

d. 28 Days to Thanksgiving: Offering Our Gratitude

One of the ways we live religiously as Christians is to mark time and make meanings out of specific time periods. For example, in Canada, we kick off the new school year after Labour Day, observing this time as a period of fresh starts, renewal, and thankfulness.

Written to coincide with the opening weeks of the school year, with fall, and with harvest time, the overall theme for the worship services in this program is “Offering Our Gratitude.” The worship and children’s program resources for the five Sundays provide multiple ways to express thanksgiving, reflect on the change of seasons from summer into fall, and attend to new beginnings, culminating with Thanksgiving Sunday. The key to gratitude lies in our ability to deepen our appreciation about what is special in our ordinary lives. Paying close attention to our ordinary experiences, we may touch the Divine glory that shines through and manifests in human and creation’s beauty and in our brokenness.

Each week, we are invited to think about and share our experience of gratitude by focusing on a particular component—music, silence, food, and creation. We are invited to examine how our experience around these components is limited by our lack of awareness, our lack of generosity, and our lack of openness to difference. For example, we are invited to stretch out our ways of worship (by learning new songs, using our bodies, and trying silence). Ultimately, we are invited to imagine offering gratitude in ways that are supple, abundant, and overflowing rather than through actions confined by a sense of scarcity, fear, and duty.

On Sunday 1, we use multiple ways of making **music**—singing with voices, bodily movements, and by making sounds with musical instruments and our human body. Children’s program participants will explore the power of music and sound-making through biblical stories (Exodus 15:20–21 Miriam).

In contrast, on Sunday 2, we explore the power of **silence** and non-verbal ways of offering gratitude. Here we will incorporate meditative rituals (such as anointing with oil) as we reflect on the passages of the woman anointing Jesus as an example of offering gratitude (John 12:1–8).

Sunday 3 worship invites us to meditate on the importance of **food**—an offering rooted in Jewish faith and central to Jesus’ ministry (Mark 6:30–44). Sunday 3 coincides with harvest celebrations in the East Asian lunar calendar; the service will share how people in other parts of the world celebrate the mid-autumn festival, the harvest moon, with food. Children’s program participants will learn about the power of eating together and sharing meals with the saints of every time and place.

Last, but not least, Sunday 4 deals with the exploitation of the **creation** as the opposite way of offering gratitude. This service addresses the problem of our commodification and consumption of the natural world because of a culture of greed (Genesis 1, Isaiah 24). We explore how living with respect in creation is the way to give thanks to God, the creator of all. The worship and children's program will tap into Indigenous peoples' wisdom and spirituality. Sunday 4 encourages us to dedicate ourselves to ecological justice.

On Sunday 5, Thanksgiving Sunday will be dedicated to integrating elements of the previous four worship services in a culmination offering of gratitude. The worship recognizes the abundance of the harvest, the gifts of creation, and the contribution of our human labour inspired by God's guidance and grace.

The worship liturgies were prepared by the Rev. Dr. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Associate Professor of Preaching at Emmanuel College, Toronto, with sermons by the Rev. Dr. Kathleen James-Cavan, minister at St. Andrew's United Church, Imperial, Saskatchewan, and Associate Professor of English at University of Saskatchewan. The children's program was developed by the Rev. David Kim-Cragg, ecumenical chaplain at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Find the complete
5-week worship series
at **united-church.
ca/worship-theme/
stewardship-worship.**

Sunday 1

We Offer Gratitude through Music

Note: This service aims to offer gratitude to God by making different sounds (gong, musical instruments, human voices, clapping, and clanging). Feel free to bring objects that make noises to offer thanks to God in recognition of the abundant gifts of God. Also, most prayers will be sung, and the hymns chosen reflect diversity in tunes, cultures, and languages. This service is intended to be an intergenerational service. Involve children in worship. While there will be a sermon, it is to be short and animated. Children's program activity is provided, but it could be incorporated as a Children's Time activity.

Prelude

Welcome

God be with you.

And also with you.

We greet one another in the name of the triune God:

Source of Love, Love Incarnated, Wisdom of Love.

Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

Long before those of us who are settlers and those who are descendants of settlers came to this land, there were people here. We acknowledge that many Nations of Indigenous people have lived on the land. We give thanks to this land, the territory of the *(name of the Indigenous people(s) whose territory you are in)* and commit to the stewardship of this land.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a symbolic action to recognize God's presence.

In every moment, Christ's light shines. Alleluia!

Call to Worship with the Sounding Gong

Hear the sound!

God is calling. *(gong)*

We are gathered.

God is present. *(gong)*

Thanks be to God.

Hallelujah! Amen. *(gong)*

Sung Opening Prayer

"Come Now, O God of Peace" (*Voices United 34*) (in English and Korean)

Opening Hymn

“Make a Joyful Noise” (VU p. 820) *(use all instruments and objects)*

Prayer of Confession

“God Weeps” (More Voices 78) *(creating a quiet mood in contrast to the song before)*
(Silence while the music for MV 78 is playing.)

Sung Assurance of Pardon

“I Come with Joy” (VU 477) vs. 1

Invitation Hymn to Children’s Time

“Give to Us Laughter” (VU 624) *(last verse sung with “Ha ha ha” and clapping)*

Children’s Time: Praying Three Times

A very long time ago, in the 4th century, there lived a theologian (named Augustine) who said, “Those who sing pray twice.” What does that mean? *(Pause, engage with the responses from children.)*

I think it means that when we sing, we pray to God better, at least twice better and maybe more. Our voices are gifts of God and from God. God is pleased to hear our voices in song.

Why is God happy to hear our voices? *(Pause, engage with the responses from children.)*

God is happy because we are happy. God senses that we are happy when we sing. God can feel our heart beating because singing expresses the joy of our heart. Because God is in relationship with us, God cares for how we are doing.

Today, we want to talk about one more thing concerning singing. If singing with our voices is praying twice, I wonder what happens when we sing *and* use the instruments that make sounds *and* use our bodies to make sounds. Do you think when we do all of these things, we are praying three times?

I think not only are our voices gifts, but also our bodies are gifts, just as instruments that make sound and music are gifts. When we sing, move, and use our bodies, as well as instruments, we pray better and more. God is pleased. We offer our thanks to God in an even better way.

Do you know the name of the first person in the Bible who sang with an instrument and danced? *(Pause, engage with the responses from children.)*

It was Miriam. She was the sister of Moses and Aaron. Let us learn more about her in the sermon (and/or children’s program).

Some of us sing well and use our bodies very naturally. For others, singing and moving are more difficult. But all of us are called to earnestly to raise our voices and praise God with our bodies and instruments. Offering gratitude to God is not a competition or a test. It is a beautiful way to worship God and to worship one another.

So let us sing, make harmony, use our bodies, and make noises!

Children's Program *(See p. 54.)*

(Children may leave for the children's program if it is not an intergenerational service.)

Invitation Hymn to Offering

"We Give Our Thanks" (MV 187) *(in Tswana and English, pointing to hands, eyes, feet, and hearts as indicated by each verse)*

Offering

Sung Prayer of Illumination

"Over My Head" (MV 88) vs. 1 *(raise hand, swinging body)*

Scripture

Exodus 15:20; Psalm 100; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Sermon

"Spiritual Aerobics" *(See p. 52.)*

Response Hymn

"Oh, a Song Must Rise" (MV 142) *(use all instruments)*

Prayers of the People (finger prayer)

Note: As each part is prayed, a finger is raised or uncurled or pointed. At the end, the whole hand is open. It is possible that not everyone may have or be able to use their fingers in this way. You might use this prayer using other symbols to demonstrate parts of making a whole, e.g., individual orange segments or a jigsaw puzzle.

Dear God,

We give you our thanks and praise for all the gifts we have received from you over the week.

As we begin our new (school) year, help each of us study and work hard as you intend us to do *(raise first finger/thumb)*.

We now pray to reach out to those people and places in need of prayer.

We pray for the leaders, in churches and of nations, as they strive for peace and justice (*raise second finger*).

Sung Refrain “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154) (vs. 1)

We pray for the strongest people and nations that are wealthy and powerful as they learn to share their wealth and power, and as we long for a world filled with freedom and equity (*raise third finger*).

Sung Refrain “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154) (vs. 2)

We pray for the most vulnerable, the sick, the sorrowful, the lonely, and the oppressed, as they feel your healing power and your comforting presence (*raise fourth finger*).

Sung Refrain “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154) (vs. 3)

We pray for the smallest people and nations—and creation—that suffer, as they proudly and courageously make their voices heard (*raise fifth finger/thumb*).

Sung Refrain “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154) (vs. 4)

Commissioning

“Sent Forth by God’s Blessing” (VU 481)

Benediction Song

“Go now in peace” (VU 964) (*round, acapella*)

Worship Follow-Up Activities

- Find people, young and senior, newcomers and seasoned members, who play musical instruments. Reach out to them and invite them to offer their musical gifts in worship and beyond.
- Reach out to people who enjoy non-European cultures; they may be encouraged to share and teach other music styles.
- Plan a special service of offering music (for fundraising or a stewardship campaign, and so on).
- Plan to include some of these activities in celebrating the Thanksgiving Sunday service.
- Think about offering opportunities for generosity, using music as a teaser. For example, you might announce a special donation invitation for a sound system, or new mics or speakers, or to buy new musical instruments for worship, or to remove old carpets to improve the acoustics of the sanctuary.

Sermon: Spiritual Aerobics

(Consider displaying several tambourines in your worship space.)

You may or may not have grown up with giving thanks for food before meals, using a scripted prayer. Perhaps you continue this spiritual practice. When I was a child, my siblings and I dutifully folded our hands before each meal (except before breakfast on busy school days) and said, “Thank you for the world so sweet/Thank you for the food we eat/Thank you for the birds that sing/Thank you God for everything” no matter the state of the world that day or the look of the food on our plates. Sometimes I did not want to thank anyone, least of all God, who was supposed to be on my side, for the detested soup in my bowl or the kid on the playground who bullied me. In speaking the words anyway, did I learn hypocrisy instead of gratitude? What does it mean to “rejoice always” or to make a “joyful noise” (Psalm 100:1) to God and, in doing so, is there a chance that gratitude for blessings might inure us to the injustice that loads abundance on some plates and empties others? In other words, how do we authentically make a joyful noise of gratitude in the full knowledge of our human failings?

For an example, let’s look at Miriam who for the second time (possibly) witnesses Moses’ salvation from water. (She may have watched when, as an infant, Moses was taken up from the river by Pharaoh’s daughter.) Now, Miriam sings, dances, and plays a tambourine in gratitude after she, Aaron, and Moses, along with all the Israelites, have emerged untouched by the Red Sea while it closed over Pharaoh and the Egyptian Army. As the enemy drowns, Moses and the Israelites sing their gratitude to God, source of strength and salvation, but Miriam goes further. When she and the women pick up tambourines and dance, they embody the victory of the oppressed over the oppressor in a language that amplifies the words of Moses’ song. The language of the body—movement punctuated by drumbeat and the clash of cymbals—visibly and physically enacts the freedom they have gained because God has triumphed. In this act and because in her whole body she understands whom to thank, Miriam is called “prophet.”

A prophet has the special status of truth-teller or one who urges the people to obey God. Moses, of course, is the most significant prophet in the Hebrew Bible, but Miriam’s action here, her “joyful noise,” brings to the people a reinforcement of their indebtedness to God. She frames Moses’ song by making a refrain of his first line, “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.” In her dance and celebration, she reiterates the wisdom of Psalm 100: “Know that...God...made us” (v.3) and not we ourselves; know that we are God’s people, and this is God’s saving act.

Therefore, says Paul in the first letter to the Thessalonians, “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Note, Paul does not limit those circumstances to the good things of life, such as liberation from oppression, full bellies, or a good harvest. If we are to give thanks “in all circumstances,” if that is what constitutes true rejoicing and rest in Christ, then we cannot insulate ourselves from our flaws and disappointments even when we dance and sing for joy as did Miriam with the women. But how is this possible?

Am I to be grateful when things are not going my way? You want me to take up my tambourine when my plate is empty, when life has handed me the pits instead of the cherries? Am I to turn in gratitude to God when I know that my unearned privilege has been handed to me because others have less or none? To give thanks for good and bad is like patting my head and rubbing my stomach at the same time. (*You might invite the congregation to try this.*) Can it be done without confusing or blending the two?

It may be worth remembering that the command to “rejoice always” does not limit believers to a mood of meaningless happiness. Miriam’s joy is not like that of, say, Grey Cup winners who crow “We’re number one!” Her rejoicing is in God. Loosely translated, she could be saying something like “God is number one.” I believe that God wants us to rejoice in all that God gives, not because God needs our praise or wants us to be endlessly “happy clappy,” but precisely because in the act of giving thanks and rejoicing in God, we come together into relationship with God. We begin to know, with Miriam, that God triumphs gloriously, not we ourselves, and that though generations pass, God’s love endures forever.

As we explore the theme of gratitude over the next four Sundays, we will be challenged to bring our whole selves, body and mind, to thanksgiving. Dancing and playing tambourines, Miriam and the other Israelite women lead us in a kind of spiritual aerobics, a full body experience of gratitude. As we move into the week ahead, let’s emulate Miriam and the Israelite women by mentally beating the tambourine and dancing each time we remember to thank God for God’s faithfulness.

Children's Program

Preparation

Teachers (at least one teacher) and volunteers (who play music or sing well) rehearse ahead of time with a few musical instruments: a tambourine (to represent Miriam), a guitar (instead of a lyre for David), a trumpet (to represent Jubilee), and a flute or pipe (for Jesus). Finding four children who could confidently play together in front of a congregation might be challenging, so adapt according to your congregation. Four passages from the Bible (Exodus 15:20–21; 1 Samuel 16:14–17; 21–23; Leviticus 25:8–10; and Matthew 9:23–26) are printed on separate pieces of paper and placed in a box. Both the instruments and box are placed on a table. A simple and joyful hymn that celebrates giving thanks is also prepared, using these instruments. Ideally, select music that children already know. This music may be played on Thanksgiving Sunday as an offertory.

Opening

Welcome the children to the children's program and check in, asking each child about their week. Introduce new friends. Then offer a prayer, such as:

Let us pray...

God, thanks for gathering us today.

Help us learn about offering thanks to you, O God.

We pray this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Introduction to Activity

How do we offer thanks to God? (*Pause and engage with the children.*) (*One possible response is that*) We pray to God to say thanks. That is one way to offer our gratitude to God. A long time ago, our ancestors in faith encouraged us to give thanks to God by singing. They said something like this: "If we sing to God well, we pray twice, so long as it is from love." Do you agree with them? Today, let us learn to sing and give thanks to God at least twice. In fact, if we sing to God with our bodies as well as with musical instruments, how many times would that be? Do you think God will be even more pleased?

Engaging Activity

Teachers, volunteers, and children gather around the table with the instruments and box. Ask the children whether they play any instruments. Talk about the way each instrument might express something different about the way we feel. Ask how we feel when we hear different instruments played at the same time. Each child (assuming that the group has at least four children) is invited to open the box in turn and take out one of the pieces of paper carrying a Bible passage. Each time a child reads the Bible passage aloud and identifies (perhaps with help) the

instrument referenced in the Bible passage. Then a teacher provides a short lesson about the passage, explaining what and why Miriam and David did what they did, why the trumpet was played on the day of Jubilee, and why Jesus told the story he did.

Share the simple and joyful hymn that was prepared ahead of time. Encourage any who can play one of the instruments to accompany the hymn. After the hymn, invite the children to reflect on what it is like to sing and play music together. Expressions of fun and joy can be shared as a concrete way of offering God thanksgiving.

Closing

Offer a prayer that incorporates the children's reflections from their sharing.

e. Season of Gratitude: World Communion Sunday to All Saints'

This stewardship series begins on World Communion Sunday and culminates on All Saints' Sunday, exploring dimensions of wisdom through the guidance of the Psalms. Wisdom is the root of gratitude. We can't be grateful unless we are wise to the movement of God in the whole of our lives.

At the outset, the congregation is invited to wonder at the blessing of God, then take its wonderful wisdom "on the road" in week two. In weeks three and four, we consider how God abides with us in the challenges on the journey, sitting with us on the bench of life like the dearest of companions and walking with us, encouraging us to circle back to hope when we encounter despair. We culminate the series on All Saints' Sunday, revelling in the energy of the cosmic party God invites us to join. The movement of the services starts with wonder and returns to wonder and rejoicing; in that way, it mirrors the fulsome journey of faith.

All of the liturgies and sermons can be adapted for your context and are general enough that they can be used at any time of the year with some minor adjustment. The prayers and rituals engage all five senses as they explore dimensions of wisdom.

The children's curriculum includes youth activities/discussion points as well as an all-ages program and a Children's Time for worship.

Sunday 1: On World Communion Sunday, we explore God's invitation to the universal church to wonder through Psalm 104 and discover that God offers us wisdom to wonder and share. The liturgy includes a blessing ritual with laying on of hands for the team overseeing this stewardship campaign.

Sunday 2: To celebrate Thanksgiving, we explore the blessings of God as wisdom "For the Road" by reflecting on Psalm 26. The liturgy is appropriate for Thanksgiving Sunday, but the sermon could be adapted for any Sunday in which gratitude is a focus.

Sunday 3: On Sunday 3, we explore wisdom "From the Bench," and sit with the anguish and lament of Psalm 22 as it gives way to the promise of Psalm 23. The sermon and liturgy explore the challenge of our call to seek justice and the promise of God to accompany us on the journey.

Sunday 4: On Sunday 4, we explore wisdom "In the Round," turning to Psalm 126 for inspiration. The service centres around the knowledge that God draws us full circle from despair to hope and that once we've travelled that circle, we can't help but extend hope through our personal and communal mission.

Sunday 5: We celebrate and offer gratitude for “All the Saints” on the final Sunday of the stewardship campaign. Psalm 146, which kicks off the so-called Hallelujah Psalms, leads us to find wisdom in the “Holy Happening,” the cosmic party God throws for all of us together.

The worship materials were developed by the Rev. Caroline Penhale, Team Minister, Congregational Care and Outreach, Orleans United Church, Orleans, Ontario; sermons were prepared by the Rev. Trisha Elliott, member of the Philanthropy Unit Team; and the children’s program was prepared by the Rev. Molly Bell, Team Minister, Faith Formation and Leadership Development, Orleans United Church, Orleans, Ontario.

Find the complete
5-week worship series
at **united-church.
ca/worship-theme/
stewardship-worship.**

Sunday 1 – (World Communion Sunday) Individual Life of Faith

(Today's service will emphasize the act of blessing and the senses of taste and smell. It includes a communion liturgy and an anointing ritual. Have worshippers come forward to receive the elements and then proceed to a designated spot where they will receive the anointing and blessing. For the sense of smell, scent the oil with essential oil of frankincense or myrrh, or perhaps citrus oil if that would be better tolerated. Have an unscented option available.)

We Gather

Prelude

Greeting/Welcome/Acknowledgement of the Traditional Territory

One: Welcome in the name of the Christ.

All: Welcome to this place of worship, situated on the Traditional lands of the _____ people(s).

One: Welcome to this place of blessing, this space of grace, and this holy sanctuary.

All: We gather this morning to share in the Word, the Cup, and the Bread and to receive God's deepest blessing that we might in turn be blessing to others.

One: So, be welcome.

All: Be blessed.

One: Be.

Lighting of Christ Candle (if this is the congregation's tradition)

We light this candle to remember that in Christ Jesus, we are indeed most blessed.

Call/Invitation to Worship (based on Psalm 104)

One: Eternal God, you are great indeed.

All: Praise God, O my soul.

One: You spread heaven like a tent and make the winds your messengers.

All: Praise God, O my soul.

One: You fix the earth on its foundations so that it can never tremble.

All: Praise God, O my soul.

One: You've designed the world for blessing and have blessed us without limit.

All: Praise God, O my soul.

One: Come, let us bless one another and God with our worship.

Opening Prayer (same prayer each week)

Holy and gracious God, we gather as seekers, lovers, disciples, and friends. We gather to give you thanks for the blessings of our lives and to replenish and refuel for the road ahead. We gather to learn the wisdom of your way and feel the warmth of your love. Bless this gathering as we join together in wholehearted worship. Amen.

Hymn

"For the Beauty of the Earth" (*Voices United* 226) or "Come, O Fount of Every Blessing" (VU 559)

Children's Time

"Letting Go" (*See p. 64.*)

Hymn

"I'm Gonna Shout, Shout" (*More Voices* 183) or "God, Help Us to Treasure" (MV 147)

We Receive the Word

Prayer for Illumination

Holy One, as we listen once more to the wisdom of your Word, may we be fed both in mind and body. Help us open to your revelation of love and to receive your blessing with grace.

Scripture

Exodus 19: 1-6

Psalms 104:1-13, 24a

1 Peter 2:1-5

Luke 12:32-34

Choir Anthem or Hymn

Sermon

Wisdom to Wonder and Share (*See p. 62.*)

Hymn

“Come, Now, You Blessed” (VU 592) or “I Have Called You by Your Name” (MV 161)

We Respond

Announcements

(Use as a way of sharing about the ministry of the congregation.)

Minute for Mission

(Search “Stories of Our Mission” at united-church.ca.)

Commissioning/Blessing of the Stewardship or Giving Team with the Laying On of Hands

(Invite the team members to come forward and, if they are willing/comfortable, have them hold hands or lay a hand on another’s shoulder. Say a few words about your community’s stewardship campaign and about the hopes and dreams of the congregation as it seeks to live out its mission, and then pray the following blessing over them.)

May your work on behalf of this community of faith be fruitful. May generosity pervade every area of our lives; of your lives. May we find new ways to share abundantly with our neighbours. We are grateful for your caring, your vision, and your leadership.

Thank you. May you be blessed and held in God’s grace as you hold the vision for this campaign. Amen.

(Invite the team members to go back to their seats as you prepare for the offering.)

Invitation to the Offering

Moved by your love of us, and grateful for our blessings, let us take up our offering with joy and a generosity of spirit. Amen.

Offertory Hymn

“What Can I Do?” (MV 191) (*followed by*) “We Will Take What You Offer” (MV 196)

Prayer of Dedication (all together)

Gracious God, we pray that our offering this morning will multiply our blessings so that our neighbours next door and across the globe might be nourished in body, mind, and spirit. We pray that your reign of love and justice be made tangible and visible and that no one be left out of the banquet. Amen.

Holy Communion

(Suggest using either Prayer B (page 243) or Prayer H (page 262) from Celebrate God's Presence.)

(Have people come forward to receive the elements; they then proceed to the anointing station.)

Anointing

(The presider makes the sign of the cross in oil (scented or unscented) on either the person's hand or forehead (their choice). You may wish to bless them in the name of the Triune God, or in the name of the Spirit of God.)

We Are Sent Out

Commissioning

Go into the world this week knowing you are anointed and blessed without limit. Share the blessing of God with friends, neighbours, even strangers. Reach out, extend yourself, and let God surprise you. Be blessed and be a blessing this week and all your days. Amen.

Hymn

“Joyful, Joyful We Adore You” (VU 232) or “May the God of Hope Go with Us” (VU 424)

Sung Blessing

“May the Blessing of God Be upon You” (VU 429)

Postlude

Sermon: Wisdom to Wonder and Share

Psalm 104

Psalm 104 paints a picture. You can imagine the canvas being filled as the psalm moves along: the waters flowing through the mountains and the valleys; teams of fish swimming in it; animals drinking off to the side; the birds singing while they circle and make nests; the cattle in the distance grazing; trees providing shade; a sunset; people working together peacefully, making wine, bread, and oil.

The scene is so picturesque, so perfect that the psalmist's heart is stirred. "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live" (v. 33), they declare.

Surely, we've all had such heart-stirring moments. Canoeing in the impossibly blue water of Moraine Lake in Alberta was one of those times for me. Getting a first glimpse of Stonehenge was another. Visiting Mississagi Lighthouse in Meldrum Bay, Ontario, another. (*The preacher inserts their own examples.*) So many times I've looked at God's good creation and my heart has been blown away—or blown open.

In his writings, Plato said that contemplating and wondering at the cosmos leads the soul to God because all of creation is a reflection of the beauty of the Divine. When we wonder at creation and are charged with the glory of God through it, our soul transcends time and space. We are totally present to the moment. Wonder transports us to the deep.

"Teach Me, God, to Wonder" (VU 299), the song goes.

Wonder is a portal to the Divine. Maybe that's why Jesus talked about the extraordinariness of seemingly ordinary things. Why he took bread and turned it into communion. Why he took fish and turned it into revelation. Why he took a cross and turned it into redemption. Why he took a child—and all of the wide-eyed amazement that filled the child—onto his knee and said "For it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew 19:14). Why he gathered a group of people like you and me together and called us disciples.

Teach me, God, to wonder. That's my prayer.

Yearning to wonder for me isn't escapist. It's not about escaping my inbox, my to-do list, my housekeeping. Sigh. It's about being faithful. I want to wonder so that I can be more engaged. How can any of us love something we don't wonder about? We are never moved to care about something we keep at arm's length.

Psalm 104 not only wonders at the creativity of God, but also connects God's creativity with our own ability to be creative. The psalm says that God causes the plants to grow, and we cultivate them. We make the wine and bread and oil. It's a team effort. We are united with God in a mission to cultivate the wonder. To ensure the world is wonder-full. To resist diminishing wonder by putting a price on it, restricting it, harming it, polluting it.

Teach us God, to wonder.

When we join with God’s mission in our personal lives, together as a congregation and as a worldwide church, we are saying that the beauty, bounty, and peace in the picture Psalm 104 paints—the waters flowing through the mountains and the valleys, the teams of fish swimming, the animals drinking off to the side, the birds singing while they circle, the cattle in the distance grazing, the people working together making bread and oil—is for everyone.

Over the next few weeks of our stewardship campaign, we are going to contemplate wisdom on the journey and what it means to live a meaningful, God-filled life. We are going to listen to the wisdom of the psalms in our sermons, those great psalms that have accompanied us for hundreds of years.

Why? Because Psalm 104 and the others we are going to hear aren’t just quaint words we can imagine hung on a wall. They represent a vision for our lives and for the world.

God’s wonder is for everyone.

Teach us, God, to wonder.

Verse 31 of Psalm 104 reads: “May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works.”

You get the sense here of how deeply the psalmist longs for God, the divine artist, to sit back from the canvas of the world and say “Yes! This is how I envisioned it. Yes! It is good. It is very good.”

On the seventh day, the story goes, God rested. But then what? Well, we know how artists roll. Michelangelo didn’t stop at the Pieta. He went on to create David. After Da Vinci’s Last Supper there was the Mona Lisa.

Artists never stop creating. It’s in their bones.

Likewise, God never stops creating. God’s spirit beckons us into other wonder-filled visions of the world. Dreams of lions lying down with lambs, of promised lands, of a new heaven and new earth. Wonder upon wonder to stir our hearts.

Allow yourself to be wonder-struck. Allow your heart to be stirred by the beauty of God. Allow your wonder to transport you to the deep places where the waters of mission baptize, cleanse, and refresh you to live your mission.

Let God teach you to wonder.

There’s wonder to realize. Wonder to actualize.

Wonder to share.

There’s wisdom in the sharing.

Amen.

Children's Program

Scripture: Luke 12:32–34 – Call to give to those who are in need

Theme: We can share what we have been given

Worshipping as an entire community of faith provides meaningful experiences for children in worship. You might invite the children to participate in the opening liturgical moments of the service, including sharing a Call to Worship and/or Lighting the Christ Candle. Engaging the children in a dedicated Children's Time allows them to feel valued and recognized within their faith family. This is a time to connect with the children (and the adults are fortunate enough to "listen in"), so it is important to use language and themes that are age-appropriate, including giving special consideration to the ways in which the scripture and prayer are offered.

Scripture Story

Paraphrase today's story, emphasizing that Jesus calls us to give to the poor and says that our heart is where our treasure is. Transition into the lesson by explaining how you have put your "treasures" into your backpack.

Children's Sermon: Letting Go

Moral: Sometimes, we have to let go of the things we hold as precious and dear in order to do God's work in the world.

Supplies: Two chairs big enough for a leader (or adult volunteer) to crawl under and a child's backpack filled with stuffies, blankets, and other items that would be precious to a child.

Show the children the backpack you have filled with loved objects. Put the backpack on, telling the children how much you love what is in it, how important the backpack is to you, and how you never want to let it go.

Then wonder with the children if you (or the volunteer) could crawl under the chairs with the backpack on. Try to make your way under the chair while wearing the backpack. Even if you try your hardest, you can't make it. Have the children help you figure out what a solution would be (e.g., take off the backpack and have someone pass it to you on the other side). Tell the children how hard it is to let go of your backpack and how scary it feels to make the decision to take it off and let someone else hold it.

Once you have entrusted the backpack to someone else, show the children you can now do what you wanted to do—crawl under the chair. Talk with the children about the story Jesus told his friends about how hard it is to share what we have with others when sometimes we just want to store it up for ourselves. Share that elsewhere in the Bible Jesus says that it would be easier for a camel to fit into a teeny tiny space than it is for some people to share their precious things with those who are in need. Wonder together what the children have that they might share (e.g., food, money, toys, clothes, love, and kindness).

Close your time together in prayer (a “repeat-after-me” prayer):

Dear God,

Thank you for giving us so many wonderful things. Help us to share what we have with people who do not have everything they need. Help us to share your love with other people, just as Jesus taught us to do.

Amen.

Following the Children’s Sermon

The children are invited to pursue the children’s program for the remainder of the worship time (approximately 45 minutes).

Once children have gathered together, engage them in activities as their energy, ages, and interests dictate. Some groups will want to start with a story and discussion. Others will need more active engagement through the activities or games. Feel free to supplement the suggested ideas with favourite activities appropriate to your context. Offering activity stations with puzzles, Playdough, Lego, books, colouring, stickers, and so on, allows children to be engaged in a variety of ways each week.

Children’s Book

The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister (ages 4–8)

Wanting to hold tight to the things that we love can limit our ability to see the needs of others around us and to share God’s goodness with all. In this popular story, Rainbow Fish loves his beautiful shiny scales, but he learns that when he is brave enough to share them with others, the whole ocean becomes a happier place. The advice given from the wise octopus to Rainbow Fish mirrors Jesus’ words to the rich man—it is only when we let go of our need to have it all that we can find true peace.

Reflection questions:

- What did Rainbow Fish have to share?
- How did Rainbow Fish feel after sharing his scales with all the fish?
- Recall and talk about the times you have had to share. Is it easy to share?
- How does it feel when someone shares their snack/toy/game with you?
- What do you have that you could share with other people, especially those who do not have as much as you?

Activity: Over-and-Under Obstacle Course

Following on from the Children’s Sermon, “Letting Go,” the children will have their own opportunity to try an over-and-under obstacle course.

Props: Chairs, tables, blankets, milk crates, stools, boxes, and cushions

Using the props, design an obstacle course where children will have to crawl under/jump over/duck under/walk over things to get from one end to the other. Try doing the course in pairs, or backwards, or where participants carry something in their hands, or where they wear a backpack.

Craft: Camel Puppets

From the Children's Sermon, the children will have heard how hard it is for a camel to fit into a tiny space. Talk about what Jesus meant when using that analogy, then create a camel craft.

You will need:

- Clothes pins
- Egg cartons
- Brown construction paper
- Googly eyes
- Pipe cleaners
- Popsicle sticks
- Glue/tape
- Crayons/markers

Use either a construction paper cut out (check for camel-shaped templates on the Internet) or two sections of an egg carton to create the camel's body. The camel's legs can be made from clothes pins or pipe cleaners. Use construction paper to create the camel's head (include googly eyes if you wish) and attach it to the camel's body. Attach a Popsicle stick and turn the camel into a puppet.

Useful websites to search:

- [The Bible Made Me Do It](#)
- [Artists Helping Children](#)

Youth

Youth understand what it is to feel deeply, to need an encouraging word, to wonder if anyone is really listening. Encouraging youth to think of ways in which they might use their gifts to support others in their struggles and uncertainties is a way to empower youth to share God's love. Being good stewards of our resources means using all the gifts we have been given, both practical and intangible, to share God's goodness with the world.

Share the scripture lesson with the youth. You might read several different versions, or read the story and invite them to dramatize it, adding their own references to today's contexts.

Discussion questions following scripture:

- If you could hear a message from God, what would you want to hear?
- Have you ever received a kind word or gesture at an unexpected moment? How did that feel?
- How can we make our community a more caring and compassionate place?
- What messages do you think our community needs to hear right now?

Youth Activity: Kindness Rocks

Visit The Kindness Project online and explore how other people have created messages of hope, inspiration, and encouragement to share with their community. Create “kindness rocks” to leave around the church grounds, around the neighbourhood, and around the youth’s schools.

Gather medium sized rocks and using acrylic paint, paint pens, and/or Sharpie markers, decorate the rocks with images and words that share God’s love with others. Once completed, seal the rocks with Podge glue to protect the designs from the elements. Have the youth place their rocks around their communities in areas where they will be found by others, e.g., parks, gardens, beaches, pathways. Offer a blessing on the rocks to those who will find them.

Lift up the ways that the youth are stewards of God’s goodness when they share their love and kindness with others.

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

Program: united-church.ca/stewardship

Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship



f. Discipleship Is Stewardship: Five Sundays for Any Time of the Year

Discipleship is stewardship. That phrase might seem simple and obvious and yet, the implications are far-reaching for those of us who seek to walk in the way of Jesus. Discipleship is stewardship opens our eyes to the reality that everything we see is a gift from God, entrusted to our stewardship, and how we manage these gifts is an act of discipleship, a spiritual practice. How we view stewardship says much about who we are as faithful people, for stewardship grounds us in the present while focusing us on God's mission through Jesus. You simply cannot separate the two from one another. Maybe that's why Jesus talked more about money and the love of God than anything else during his ministry. Stewardship is the lifestyle of the disciple!

This program focuses on Paul's letter to the church in Corinth found in 2 Corinthians 9:6–15 and will address issues related to gratitude, commitment, relationship, abundance, and thanksgiving. Together, these five aspects of discipleship are embodied in a full life of stewardship. Each week includes a complete worship outline, including a sermon, with hymn suggestions, and a children and youth program.

The program also includes NEW music titled "This Indescribable Gift," specially composed by David Kai. (See the full worship resources for *Discipleship Is Stewardship: Five Sundays for Any Time of the Year*, which can be found at united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship.) You will also find a module for Stewardship@Home. In keeping with our belief that stewardship is a lifestyle of the disciple, the writers are encouraging the home to be part of the process of Christian nurturing and learning. The @Home portions are designed to be a time for everyone in the family to participate.

Written by the Rev. Mary Nichol (Pacific Mountain Region Staff for Education for Children's and Family Ministries), the Rev. Ryan Slifka (St. George's United Church, Courtenay, British Columbia), the Rev. Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes (Emmanuel United Church, Windsor, Ontario), the Rev. Bob Fillier (Trinity United Church, Prince George, British Columbia), and the Rev. Paul Douglas Walfall (Fort Saskatchewan United Church, Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta).

Week 1

Gratitude and Discipleship

Gather

Welcome

This is the first week of a five-part series on Giving and Discipleship in which we look more closely at 2 Corinthians 9. Today, the focus of our worship is on gratitude and how the spiritual practice of gratitude can ground our journey as disciples of Jesus. We can and should nurture this practice that is also the foundation of our ability to give generously.

Acknowledgement of the Traditional Territory

(If it is your community's practice, you are encouraged to insert a Territory Acknowledgement here. A good source for naming the original inhabitants of your community and learning more about Territory Acknowledgement is native-land.ca.)

Candle Lighting

As we gather to worship, we light this candle to remember the light and love that Jesus shared with so many. He did not keep this light to himself. After Jesus died, his friends continued to share the light. For generations upon generations the light has been shared, and love continues; Jesus is still with us. Today, in love, we welcome the light, the light of the world.

Call to Worship

One: We gather to give thanks, O Creator God.

All: Holy One, we are here.

One: Be with us as we pray and sing together.

All: Holy One, we are here.

One: Be with us in our words, in our listening, and in our hearts.

All: Holy One, we are here

One: We are here to worship, to remember the gifts flowing from you, O Creator God, and to give thanks.

Find the complete 5-Sunday worship series at **united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship**.

Opening Prayer

God of infinite blessings, you touch our lives with love and blessings all around us. We come to this place today ready to hear your voice working through us, ready to celebrate your spirit among us. Help us to be open to your Word and to answer your call to each one of us. Amen.

Opening Song

“I Can Feel You Near Me God” (*More Voices* 48) or “Make a Joyful Noise” (Psalm 100) (*Voices United* 820)

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, we know that we can get caught up in feeling powerless and in the hopelessness of our situation.

We find it hard to see the blessings that surround us.

We can get rooted in despair,

caught up in confusion or anger at what is happening in our world.

Forgive us, we pray.

(Time for silent prayer)

Words of Assurance

Our journey of discipleship does not end with powerlessness or lost hope.

Love wins; through the risen Christ we know that hope is eternal.

God’s love and grace is all around us, freely and generously given;

it is within us and flows through us.

God’s love is everlasting and sustains us on the journey. Thanks be to God.

Response

“Don’t Be Afraid” (MV 90) or “Spirit of the Living God” (VU 376 v. 1)

Passing the Peace

Engage

All Ages Theme Conversation

(Share the theme video (optional):

Gratefulness.org ‘A Grateful Day’ with Brother David Steindl-Rast (5 mins) *updated version*

or

Bible Project - bibleproject.com/explore/generosity/ (5 mins)

(Have paper hearts on hand that have been cut out ahead of time. Consider handing one to each person as they arrive for worship. Begin a conversation about the spiritual practice of gratitude: the practice of giving thanks for the blessings in our life and nurturing a heart filled with gratitude to God. You might begin with the following.)

Do you have a special time of the day where you say thank you to God? You might do this in the morning, at meal times, or in the evening. Saying thank you to God for both the little blessings and big blessings in our lives helps us to trust God. Jesus taught us to share our blessings, and when our hearts are filled with thanks, it's easy to share with others. The regular practice of saying thank you to God for our blessings helps us to want to share with other people—to share kind words and to share food. It also helps us to see when there are times to include other people in our play or when there are times to help them with a project. The regular practice of saying thanks to God is a part of learning to be a follower of Jesus.

(Invite those gathered to name what they are thankful for in their lives. Each person is invited to write on their heart something or someone for whom they are thankful, or they might draw a picture.)

(You might use the hearts to decorate the communion table or another area central to your worship space.)

Or

Testimony

(A person, probably chosen ahead of time, shares how they use the spiritual practice of gratitude. They might share how it has helped them in their daily life and/or how a change in perspective toward gratitude has helped them deal with a difficult situation.)

Song/Anthem/Special Music

“This Indescribable Gift” (see full worship resources for Discipleship Is Stewardship at united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship) or “It’s a Song of Praise to the Maker” (MV 30) or “Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow” (VU 541)

Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 9:1–5 (6–15)

Luke 19:1–10

Sermon

“Gratitude and Discipleship” (See *Week 1 Sermon Guide*, page 87.)

Song

“Creator God You Gave Us Life” (MV 27) or “All Things Bright and Beautiful” (VU 291)

Respond

Prayers of the People

God calls us to be a praying people so let us join our hearts in prayer.

Let us give thanks for the gifts of God, saying:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

For the earth and the goodness of creation,
the power of the earth to sustain us,
the wisdom of people to care, to learn, and to transform,
let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

For the people who care and heal,
the people who listen deeply,
the ones who are the hands and feet of Christ in the world,
let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

For the people who guide and teach,
the ones who mentor and educate,
the people who inspire and create,
for their wisdom and guidance,
let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

For those who stand up and speak out in truth,
the people who work endlessly for justice, for liberation, for peace,
the people who risk their lives for others,
for those who walk in the way of Christ,
let us give thanks:

We give you thanks, Generous God.

Let us gather our voices in the prayer that Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Offering Our Gifts to God

Invitation to the Offering

As we have come to present our offerings at this table,
we remember God's love, freely given.

We remember our calling to walk in the way of Christ Jesus, who is generous to all.
I invite you to give voluntarily and generously, for you are disciples of Jesus.

Offering Song

"Grateful" (MV 182) or "We Give You but Your Own" (VU 542)

Offertory Prayer

Generous God, we bring ourselves, our gifts, our talents to you.
Bless each one of us.

Take us, our gifts, and all you have made us to be,
that your work may be done in this place and in the world.

Through the power of your Holy Spirit and in your name, we pray. Amen.

Closing Song

"Ev'ry Day Is a Day of Thanksgiving" (MV 185) or "This Is God's Wondrous World"
(VU 296)

Sending Forth

Sending Forth and Blessing

As you go from this place,
go with trust in God, the source of our blessings.

Go with the spirit of gratitude,
looking for the people and places to share generously,
as we are a people rooted in God's abundance.

May the love of God surround you, the Peace of Christ be within you,
and the power of the Holy Spirit sustain you, now and always. Amen.

Sending Forth Song

"We Will Go with God" (MV 223) or "Let All Things Now Living" (VU 242) v. 1

Children/Youth/All Ages Faith Formation

Introduction

We are beginning a five-week (or five-part) series focused on giving and discipleship. Today, we begin the conversation with a focus on gratitude. When we regularly practise giving thanks to God, we cultivate a feeling of gratitude. It is from a place of gratitude that we share with others, willingly and generously.

Preparation

The focus for this week is 2 Corinthians 9:1–5. Paul is writing to siblings in Christ who live in Corinth, encouraging the Corinthians to give generously to a collection he is making to help the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul asks that the gift from the Corinthians be voluntary.

As disciples, we, too, are being asked to give for the support of others in need. It is easier for us to be generous when we first practise gratitude—a feeling of appreciation and the act of thanking God for what we have in our life. When we practise saying thank you to God for the small and big things in our lives, we cultivate a sense of having enough. As followers of Jesus, and as our gratitude takes root in our lives, we are called to share with others. Jesus invites us to live as if God’s vision for the world is here and now.

Supplies: Bible appropriate for the age group gathered; assortment of buttons

For the Gratitude Game: coloured sticks or pencil crayons

Gather

Light the Christ Candle

Check-in

Spend some time building community by going around the circle sharing names and inviting each participant (if they wish) to answer the check-in question for the day:

- In one word, how are you feeling today?

For young children, it is helpful to have emoji images showing different feelings. Display the images in the centre of the circle so the children can select one to share. See the Appendix 1 at the end of this “Children/Youth/All Ages” section for sample check-in cards.

Button Prayers

Make sure there is at least one button for each person praying. Each person chooses a button. All are led in prayer with these instructions:

- Feel the hardness of the button and think about people who are going through hard times. Ask God to help them.
- Buttons are used to fasten clothing, bringing two pieces of a garment together. Ask God to bring together people who have argued and moved apart from one another. Pray that God will bring peace.
- Look at your button and see how many holes it has. Name that number of things for which you would like to say thank you to God and say thank you prayers.
- Look at the colour of the button and thank God for something that is that colour.
- Find someone who has the same coloured button as you. Say thank you to God for families. Ask God to bless them, to help them to live together, and to help them to love one another.
- Find someone who has a different button from you—it could be different in shape, size, or colour. Thank God for making everyone different and giving us all different gifts.
- Pray for the person you have found. Ask them what they would like God to help them with.

Song

“Like a Rock” (*More Voices* 92)

Story and Wondering

Re-tell 2 Corinthians 9:1–5 in your own words, emphasizing God’s call for us to share what we have with generosity, that is, our gifts are given freely and willingly.

Also share the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10) as a companion story. Explore what Zacchaeus gives in spite of what others think of him. Ask:

- What part of the story did you like best?
- What part of the story is the most important?
- What other than money can you give or share with others?
- Is there someone or something you can give money or time to in your church that will make a difference in your community?

For youth:

- Watch “Generosity” from The Bible Project – bibleproject.com/explore/generosity/
- Explore the ideas of scarcity vs. abundance. Discuss where you see this active in our world today. What are some ways you can practise gratitude and live with a sense of God’s abundance?

If there is time, watch the video again. Ask the youth:

- What did you notice? What stood out for you?

Respond

Gratitude Game

This is a game of “pick up sticks.” The leader holds a collection of coloured sticks or pencil crayons, stands the bundle on a hard surface, and then releases them so that the sticks fall randomly. The goal is to remove individual sticks from the pile without moving the other sticks. Each colour represents something to be grateful for (see below for suggestions). Each participant in turn selects a stick to pull out. If they move another stick while trying to remove their stick, they lose their turn and do not collect the stick. When a person successfully removes their stick, invite them to share something they are grateful for according to the colour category of the stick. The player with the most sticks wins.

You might use the following guide for each colour:

- Red Sticks: Places you are thankful for
- Orange Sticks: Things you are thankful for
- Green Sticks: People you are thankful for
- Blue Sticks: Food you are thankful for
- Purple Sticks: Your choice of something you are thankful for

Gratitude Scavenger Hunt

This activity can be enjoyed by youth or a multi-aged group. The aim of the game is to hunt for and discover Blessings. The List of Blessings (below) can be adapted for your context; it could be adapted for an indoors activity, but an appropriate outside location would be most effective.

Supplies: Cameras/phones or paper and pens

Instructions: Hunt in small groups or as a whole group. In a whole group situation, each participant should have an opportunity to contribute. With small groups,

establish guidelines for time and geographic boundaries. Each small group has a pen and paper or phone/camera. If using phones/cameras, hand each group a sheet of paper to keep track of their photos of gratitude. They do not need to be documented in the following order.

List of Blessings

1. Nature
2. Sound
3. Taste
4. Smell
5. A challenge
6. Something I'd like to share
7. Someone older than me
8. Recently discovered or learned
9. Shows a vibrant colour
10. Has words on it
11. Makes me feel strong
12. Makes me laugh
13. Makes me cry
14. Someone I love

Random Acts of Giving

Supplies: Copy/print the “Random Acts of Giving” poster, either completed or blank, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this section

Instructions: Discuss how God calls us to live a life of gratitude. We develop this by practising saying thank you for the blessings in our lives. As followers of Jesus, we are called by God to live out God’s love for all, and we can do this by giving to others. The Apostle Paul reminds us to give freely, and Zacchaeus reminds us to share what we have with others. Brainstorm ways the group can give to others. The blank “Random Acts of Giving” chart can be filled with ideas of ways of giving to other people. If using the completed chart, participants can plan how and when they will fulfill these acts. Individual copies can be made for the participants.

Gifts with Vision Project

Share with the group about Mission & Service and Gifts with Vision (giftswithvision.ca). As a group, decide which gift(s) to give from the Gifts with Vision options. You could decide on several gifts to give depending on your timeframe. The goal is for the project to be completed by the end of this series of five sessions.

Using the scripture passages from 2 Corinthians and Luke as inspiration, create a plan to raise the funds and to include the whole church community in this project.

Create a Gratefulness Video

Supplies and resource person: Obtain permission from parents/guardians for youth to use a phone and an app decided upon to create a video; a leader who knows how to use the technology to make a video; items needed to write or create

Instructions: Brainstorm a list of things for which you are grateful. Then decide how to share these lists, either by writing the words or by creating a piece of art. Your challenge is to create a video focused on gratefulness. Using the phone that has the app chosen to make the video, record individuals acting, writing, or creating. (Make sure that you have permission to show each person's face in the video.) You can record someone writing or creating each item. If you are adding music, decide what would be a good match for the theme of gratefulness. You will also need to decide how to share the video. Will it be made public? Perhaps it could be shared with the whole community of faith during worship.

Closing

Closing Prayer

Loving God, we give thanks to you for the people in our lives who care for us.
Help us to pay attention to the blessings we have in our lives.
Help us to say thank you. Help us to share what we can with others.
Help us to remember that you are always with us and love us always.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Children/Youth/All Ages Faith Formation

Appendix 1 Check-in Cards



Happy



Nervous



Calm



Angry



Sad



Shy

Children/Youth/All Ages Faith Formation

Appendix 2 Random Acts of Giving

Random Acts of Giving

with love

- Write or draw a thank you card to your teacher.
- Help your parent make dinner.
- Go to bed without complaining.

- Make the bed for a family member.
- Try to be nice to everyone you meet today.
- Help with the dishes. If you are old enough, do them by yourself.

- Make a list of "10 reasons I love you" to give to a family member.
- Ask your parent what you can do for them today.
- Smile at everyone today.

- Make cookies for someone.
- Write a list of what you are grateful for today.
- Write 5 notes "I hope you have a good day" and pass them out at school.

- Eat lunch with someone new.
- Encourage a friend.
- Write nice notes to family members and hide them around the house (in jacket pockets, books, under pillows, etc).

Children/Youth/All Ages Faith Formation

Appendix 2 (continued)



Stewardship@Home

Preparation

Decide on a version of the Bible that is most accessible to your family. Have a Bible on hand. There are translations of this week's scripture focus, 2 Corinthians 9:1–5, from the *Common English Bible* and the *New Revised Standard Version* in Appendix 1 at the end of this section. Have copies of the scripture passage available for each person. Also prepare the items needed for a gratitude jar (see below).

You might consider creating a centrepiece in your home for devotions. This can be at the dining or kitchen table, coffee table, fireplace hearth, or wherever your family gathers to share. You can place the centrepiece on a cloth the colour of which complements the liturgical season. Add a candle and any number of symbols of our faith, e.g., a cross, a rock with words of inspiration, flowers, a plant.

Devotional

1. Pray: Invite everyone to take three slow, deep breaths.

Dear God, we give thanks for this day. May we remember you are as close to us as the breath that we breathe. Be with us in our hearts, in our speaking, and in our listening. Amen.

Take a few minutes for each person to name joys and concerns from the day or week.

2. Listen: Have one family member read 2 Corinthians 9:1–5 aloud; or even better, someone tells the story using their own words. The apostle Paul focuses on gifts that should be generous and voluntary. As disciples of Jesus, we can nurture our spirit of generosity by practising gratitude.

3. Discuss and Engage: As a family, discuss the Bible reading. What do we do as a regular spiritual practice of gratitude? How do we express our gratitude to others? How do we share with others as an expression of gratitude to God?

Prayer Walk

Take a walk in the neighbourhood, in a park, or along a trail, and as you journey, notice what you are thankful for. You might take a photo of each item or keep a list. Here are suggested items you might look for:

- something outside you enjoy looking at
- something that is useful for you
- something that is your favourite colour
- something you know someone else will enjoy
- something that makes you happy
- something that smells amazing
- something you have never seen before

ABCs of Gratefulness

Have fun with saying or singing your ABCs and, for each letter of the alphabet, share something for which you are grateful. You could take turns with each letter, or each person could share something for each letter.

Create a Gratitude Jar

Supplies: wide-mouthed jar or vase, glue gun, ribbon or string, scissors, double-sided tape or glue, printed gratitude label on card stock (see Appendix 2 at the end of this section); paper and pencils

Instructions

Either print the gratitude label provided (see Appendix 2) on a piece of card stock, or create your own label. Decorate the jar with string or yarn. Place a dab of glue on one end of the string and attach it firmly to the mouth of the jar. Wrap the string around the mouth of the jar as many times as you like. Cut the string, making sure to leave a little at the end. Dab more glue on the end and attach to the jar. Add any other decorations you like. Attach the label for your jar using double-sided tape or glue. Using pre-cut pieces of paper, invite each family member to note (either by writing or drawing) things and people they are grateful for, someone or something they appreciate, an act of kindness from a stranger, or a favourite memory, and place all of the pieces in your gratitude jar. (See Gratitude Jar Ideas, below, for other suggestions.)

You might make this a ritual in the way that best suits your family: perhaps once a day or once a week, in the morning, afternoon, or evening.

Gratitude Jar Ideas

- What made you smile or laugh today?
- What is something you are good at doing?
- What do you like most about where you live?
- Do you have a favourite place to visit in your community?
- List five people that you are grateful for.
- Did you listen to a song you liked?
- List some of your favourite scents.
- What family tradition are you most grateful for?
- What do you love most about your partner/family/friend?
- What are you grateful for that you normally take for granted?

Gratitude Ball

This is a fun, interactive activity for all ages. Use a small, soft ball and partner up or sit in a circle. Spend two minutes passing the ball back and forth, saying something you are grateful for with each pass.

Sharing with Others

As a family, decide on an individual or family for whom you could create a care package. Maybe it is a member of your congregation, a neighbour, or a relative. Make a list of things that you could create together that will help the person know you care about them and are thinking of them. You might include baked goods, a card, a coupon to mow the lawn, an invitation to get together for a movie night, or whatever you think the person or family might like.

Closing

Close your time together with a prayer. Include praying for each other and each person's joys and concerns that were named earlier.

Stewardship@Home

Appendix 1 Scripture Versions

2 Corinthians 9:1–5

Common English Bible

It's unnecessary for me to write to you about this service for God's people. I know about your willingness to help. I brag about you to the Macedonians, saying, "Greece has been ready since last year," and your enthusiasm has motivated most of them.

But I'm sending the brothers so that our bragging about you in this case won't be empty words, and so that you can be prepared, just as I keep telling them you will be. If some Macedonians should come with me and find out that you aren't ready, we (not to mention you) would be embarrassed as far as this project goes.

This is why I thought it was necessary to encourage the brothers to go to you ahead of time and arrange in advance the generous gift you have already promised. I want it to be a real gift from you. I don't want you to feel like you are being forced to give anything.

2 Corinthians 9:1–5

New Revised Standard Version

Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

Stewardship@Home

Appendix 2 Gratitude Jar Label



Sermon Guide: Gratitude and Discipleship

2 Corinthians 9; Luke 19:1–10

This is the first week of a five-week series focused on Giving and Discipleship. In the coming weeks, we shall reflect on giving as a patient commitment having the potential to stir generosity when done intentionally. We shall also reflect on giving as it is rooted in God's economy and as a demonstration that we are disciples. Today, we begin with a focus on the spiritual practice of gratitude and how this practice is foundational to being a follower of Jesus and our generosity.

We are in relationship with each other as a community of people on our faith journey. We seek to live as a disciple of Jesus and to centre our lives in the love and grace of God. The expression of our faith is action in the world. As a disciple of Jesus, how do we seek individually and as a community to share God's abundance and love with each other and the world?

In the 2 Corinthians scripture passage, Paul is writing to remind the Corinthians of the gift they have promised to give. The gift is a collection Paul is taking to the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul is sending some brothers in advance to make sure that the gift is generous and given voluntarily.

What does Paul's instruction for a generous and voluntary gift mean to us today? How do we give to the church and to others from a generous and voluntary place in our hearts?

For a gift to be voluntary and generous, we need to look at how we orient and root our spiritual selves. There are many practices that sustain us on this journey: spiritual practices that can help us be strong in mind and help us to remember why we are here, practices that nurture our soul and strengthen us in the journey to love Jesus and serve as he showed us. These practices help us to centre ourselves in God's love and abundance.

We can make a habit of beginning and ending our day with a ritual of gratitude. We can create a ritual at meal times to say thank you to God. To begin or end our day naming the blessings of our day and in our life helps us to name that God is good. We trust in God. We bring to our consciousness the blessings in our life and know God is present in our lives when we can name them. Gratitude is our response to God and God's blessings. When we know in our heart that God's grace is freely given, no strings attached, we are able let go of trying to hold on. We can rest in God who is generous, and then we can cultivate a life lived from a place of abundance.

The spiritual practice of gratitude makes a difference in us when we start to live differently and reach out to the world.

When the practice of gratitude is rooted in us, we breathe more deeply and we are inspired. We breathe deeply into the sense of abundance and, from this place, we are inspired to give freely, no strings attached. But there are many things in our life that get in the way of centring ourselves in God's love and grace. The pain and

anguish in life is real. There is violence, despair, and poverty in our lives and in the lives of too many people.

There are many voices around us advocating for individualism, consumerism, and autonomy. Too many of us are caught up in busyness, the push to produce, achieve, and attain. It is exhausting. And when we are caught in this whirlwind, it leads us to live in a world of scarcity.

There is so much that encourages us to view our world through the lens of scarcity. When we are rooted in this world of scarcity, of not enough, then we cannot give to others of ourselves, of our time, of our money. If we do give, it is not freely given, not voluntary. Jesus knew and taught of God's abundance. He knew that God's love and grace is freely given.

The Gospel reading today from Luke is the story of Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector, someone most people hated. A chief tax collector in the time of Jesus was a person who collected taxes for the Roman oppressors. Luke describes Zacchaeus as wealthy. One gets wealthy as a tax collector by extortion and embezzlement, by taking advantage of the people, including the working poor and the elderly. Luke also tells us that Zacchaeus has changed. Zacchaeus has seen that what he has done is wrong and is returning the money he has extorted.

I wonder what happened to Zacchaeus to make him change? When we meet him, he is trying to climb a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. Might he have heard Jesus speaking and been changed somehow by Jesus' message of God's love for all? Jesus sees Zacchaeus in the tree, names him, and invites himself to Zacchaeus' home for dinner. We can imagine Zacchaeus being thrilled to have Jesus in his home. Zacchaeus promises to give half of his income to the poor and, if he is caught cheating in the future, he will pay four times the damages. Jesus approves of his actions and names him as being a part of the family, a child of God.

Can you imagine what must have been going on in the heart and mind of Zacchaeus? I imagine he was filled with love and gratitude. He had a moment of transformation that led him to give his income to others. And to prove to Jesus he has changed, he states that if he is caught cheating, he will pay four times the damages!

Zacchaeus is changed. He now sees the world through the lens of abundance and he is filled with gratitude. God has called him and named him, and he responds with gratitude and giving. God calls each of us and names us, and through Jesus, teaches us to live a life of gratitude and giving.

Trusting in God's love and abundance does not mean that there will not be difficult times. What it means is that we can move through difficult life experiences and trauma with resilience. Seeing the world in abundance can strengthen us to move through life when it is difficult. To give generously and voluntarily is our response to God's love, which is freely given, no strings attached.

We are human and we need to be in relationship with each other, with God, with Jesus, to help us on this journey in life. These relationships are foundational in the practice of discipleship. We are called to co-create God's vision here on earth, and

this is not easy or light work. Our spiritual practices, done together and individually, help us to live with a sense of abundance and give us the will to share our abundance with others. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Amen.

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

Program: united-church.ca/stewardship

Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship



g. Loving Our Neighbours Near and Far: A Program for Any Three Weeks

This series of three worship liturgies, sermons, and children's programs form a three-week giving program that will fit into any time of the year either as a separate program or as a supplement to a similarly focused program. The three-week unit was written by the Rev. Melody Duncanson Hales and the Rev. Ruth Noble.

Sunday 1 God Inspires

Prelude

Welcome

Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

Long before those of us who are settlers and those who are descendants of settlers came to this land, there were people here. Many Nations of people live—and still live—on the land we call Canada, given responsibility by the Creator to be stewards of this land and all that lives on it. We know these people as Indigenous.

Today, as we remember what it means to **love our neighbours**, let us give thanks for the Indigenous peoples of this land—and let us remember that we worship God on the historic (*and unceded*) territory of the (*name of the Indigenous people(s) whose territory you are in*).

As Christ's people, let us be people of Love, of Truth, and of Reconciliation.

We Focus Our Hearts and Minds

Jesus says to his friends, to us here today, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

USE THE APP DISCOVER THE TERRITORY YOU ARE ON.

apps.apple.com/ca/app/whose-land/id1350310353

Find the complete
3-Sunday worship at
[united-church.ca/
worship-theme/
stewardship-worship](https://united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship).

Lighting the Christ Candle

We come to celebrate the love of God in Jesus Christ—for us, for this community, for all creation. This love reaches into our lives, inspiring us to reach out to those in need—around the corner and around the world. Will we answer the invitation to share this love to make a difference?

We light this candle to celebrate the light of Christ, the one who offers love and acceptance, not judgment and rejection.

Call to Worship

God loved the world, God loves the world, all are beloved!

May this love story shine in our worship, inviting us to share this love near and far.

We come with our doubts, our hopes, and our fears.

We come to discover how Jesus reveals God's love.

We are here to listen for God's love story and to respond to the great invitation to love as God loves.

Friends of God, here and everywhere, let us worship!

Amen!

Hymn

“Let Us Build a House” (*More Voices* 1) or “The Church Is Wherever God's People” (*Voices United* 579)

Our New Beginnings

Introduce the video *Living Our Mission Locally with* [*former Moderator*] *Jordan Cantwell* (see youtu.be/rO-I6yqkT6M).

Consider Jordan's invitation to answer the questions “What is God up to in your congregation?” and “What excites you about what God is doing through you today?”

Invite a leader to share their “Why I Give” story.

Ask: Why are you here—in the United Church and/or in this congregation? Why do you stay? What difference do you, through the church, make in the lives of others? Why—not how or what—do you give?

Invitation to Prayer

In Jesus, God became one of us: becoming poor that we could receive the gift of mercy, taking on death that we could be made alive. God is up to something wonderful in our lives, inspiring, challenging, and longing to embrace the world in love. Let us offer our prayers for new beginnings—for this day and for our lives—knowing that in God’s love we are made whole.

God, you love this world so much that you became one of us in your own child, Jesus Christ. You offer this gift of wholeness that we might have abundant life. Forgive us for keeping that life to ourselves, for holding too tight to your generous gifts, for choosing self-interest instead of your compassion and justice. Teach us what it means to live as neighbours, generously sharing your abundance with our brothers and sisters around the corner and around the world.

We pray this as Jesus taught us:

The Lord’s Prayer

Words of Promise

God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn, but in order that the world may know love. In great mercy, God speaks a word of healing and gives us life with Christ. We are forgiven, loved, and made free to make a difference. Blessed because we are made in God’s image, may we respond to God’s blessing by the way we love others.

Time for the Young at Heart

I wanted to introduce you to my friend Grover! Grover is going to help me talk about Mission & Service. Grover, we have partners in Kenya that work with farmers. Is that near or far? (*Grover is seen to ponder. Ask the kids, who hopefully will say “far.” Then Grover will run down the aisle to demonstrate “far.”*) That is right, Grover, it is far. (*Now name a Mission & Service ministry that is close to where you are and have Grover move near to the kids.*) (*Share that there are many Mission & Service partners and ministries that are both near and far.*)

Hymn

“Draw the Circle Wide” (MV 145)

Scripture

John 3:14–21

Reflection Notes

Begin the reflection by sharing a few stories of congregational life from the previous week: the highs, the lows, busy times, quiet times, joyful times, and times of sorrow.

Our faith community together can be messy and chaotic! But this is our church, and this is part of the world God loves—whether in moments of prayer and vulnerability or in moments of exuberant praise and laughter.

We love this church—all this life whirling around. All the ways that life evolves here: the welcoming of new beginnings, the grief when we say goodbye, the stress of family, the rush of planning, creating, and serving; noisy, noisy life. Messy, breathless, full and ready and dangerous even. Motion and energy, fearless. This is the world God loves. And to this world, God gives...everything.

How do you see the height and depth of God's love in your community? Where are lives changed for the better? What are the ways you are at work with God in this world that God loves so very much?

Share more stories of God at work: stories from your own community, your local mission, and stories from Mission & Service of how God, through generosity, changes lives both locally and globally.

What does it look like for us to love like God, to see the world as God sees us? Can we love the world as God loves it?

Can we love the world with God?

The Mission & Service of The United Church of Canada is one way we can love the world—touching lives here at home and around the world, changing lives today and tomorrow. In our shared Mission & Service, together, we love the world.

Do we choose today to love this world?

Because it is a choice. Between life and death, we choose it all the time. To engage or to hide. To celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to seek justice and resist evil, we choose.

In the effects of our generosity known here at home and through the Mission & Service of the United Church, we catch glimpses of how we continue, despite fear or weariness, to choose life; we catch glimpses of how we continue to choose love. Together with God, who loves this world so much, we embrace and carry each other in love.

When we live in the light of a God who loves us so passionately to give us everything, and then lets us make the choice of what to do with that gift, we can choose life, we can choose generosity, we can choose to make a difference.

Thank you for the ways you choose to love this world, near and far!

Hymn

“Come Touch Our Hearts” (MV 12)

God’s Invitation

Minute for Mission

(Search “Stories of Our Mission” at united-church.ca.)

Our Intentional Response

Being a Christian is not just about what we believe—it is a way of life!

God has blessed us abundantly. Our response to this generosity is to care for God’s beloved world and all our neighbours near and far. This includes caring for ourselves, other people, and the world. Every action and decision, no matter how mundane, comes from the starting place of recognizing this sacred responsibility. We are God’s beloved children, and this leads to living with loving and generous intention. In our community, we do this by patterning our life after Jesus Christ.

It is helpful to periodically take time to reflect on our abundant blessings and intentionally share a portion of what we have been given. The act of setting aside a portion of our time, talent, and treasure in response to God’s generosity and for the good of others and creation cultivates a deeper, stronger faith.

This Sunday, we are sharing information to help you reflect on your blessings. You have also received a Response Card—a way for you to share with us your intentions, and for us to have an understanding of our resources as we plan for future ministries.

These cards are important. This week and next, you are invited to prayerfully consider how you might support God’s mission here in this church and in the Mission & Service of the United Church, and to make an appropriate and meaningful gift of time, talent, and money. You are not required to make any decisions today; please take the time you need to make your intentions thoughtfully and in tune with God’s spirit for you.

Invitation to an Offering of Gifts

We are invited to love our neighbours, both near and far. What we bring to Christ’s table makes a difference: right in our own community, throughout Canada, and around the world. Did you know that in the 93 years of our life as The United Church of Canada, our generosity has meant that gifts of \$1.2 billion have been given to Mission & Service for the work of the church? That doesn’t even begin to count the years of time, piles of talents, and dollars and cents that have been given to this congregation of *(name)*.

In our giving, in our sharing, in our living, we are part of all God’s love. May God’s love inspire us so that we may love this world that God loves so much through our gifts today.

Sharing Our Gratitude

Prayers of Dedication, Thanksgiving, and Concern

Jesus, you remind us that God loves this world—not just our corner, but all the world. With the gifts we offer today, gifts to this congregation and to the Mission & Service of the United Church, may we love the world with you. It is in this world, messy and chaotic, joyful and delightful, that we discover your spirit and purpose for our lives. We give thanks for your abundant life, for your presence inspiring us to live in love and generosity, for times when you strengthen us to overcome challenges, for times when your love brings comfort and healing. We want to share your love with the world. Help us to care for this world that you love so dearly with open hearts: to respond to conflict with peacemaking, to respond to dis-ease with healing, to respond to cruelty with compassion. *(Include the prayers of your community.)* Holy God, Sustainer, and Renewer of life, you call us into partnership with you and with all who embrace your way. We pray for our Mission & Service partners today, for a world where abundance of creation is respected, preserved, and enjoyed, a world of right relationships, of safety, of care for the vulnerable. In your loving purpose, answer our prayers and fulfill our hopes. Grant us grace and wisdom to respond to your invitation as we live our lives in the way of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn

“Your Love Is Amazing” (MV 26)

or “My Love Colours Outside the Lines” (MV 138)

or “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (VU 333)

Blessing and Sending Out

Just as God came into the world through Jesus to heal and redeem, so God sends us into the world today to be healing, hopeful, and loving. Let us go into God’s world **to be the neighbours God calls us to be.**

Let us go into God’s world

loving God, loving our neighbour, loving ourselves,

and in that love, may we be filled with thanksgiving.

For this is God’s world. We are not alone! Thanks be to God!

Postlude



h. All in One Gratitude Sunday: A Single Sunday Program

This worship liturgy, sermon, and children’s message can be used at any time of year as a single-Sunday introduction to the principles of generosity, giving, and gratitude. It can also be used as an introductory Sunday to an extensive giving program. It was written by the Rev. Roger Janes, a member of the Philanthropy Unit team.

Prelude

*(You may opt to play one of the videos from the Called to Be the Church: The Journey playlist, youtube.com/c/unitedchurchofcanada/playlists. The video of Chris Levan **Giving Thanks/Modelling Gratitude** is one idea. The video might be played in a loop as people gather for worship.)*

Welcome

Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

Long before those of us who are settlers, and those of us who are descendants of settlers, came to this land, there were people here. Many Nations of people lived—and live—on the land we call Canada, given responsibility by the Creator to be stewards of this land and all that lives on it. We know these people as Indigenous.

Today, as we remember what it means **to live thankfully**, let us give thanks for the Indigenous peoples of this land—and let us remember that we worship God on the historic (and unceded) territory of the *(names of the Indigenous people(s) whose territory you are in)*. As Christ’s people, let us be people of Love, of Truth, and of Reconciliation.

USE THE APP DISCOVER THE TERRITORY YOU ARE ON.

apps.apple.com/ca/app/whose-land/id1350310353

Call to Worship (Option 1)

Leader: We gather today, proclaiming God's love and seeking God's blessing.

People: God loves us with an immeasurable love. God is with us always, even when we are unaware, even when we feel lost or alone.

L: In gratitude we come, proclaiming our thanksgiving and seeking to live out our love.

P: In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

L: Thanks be to God. Let us worship God.

Call to Worship (Option 2)

(based on John 21:15–19)

Children of God, do you love the God who hovered over the face of the deep and called the worlds into being?

Yes, you know that we do.

Then feed God's children.

Children of God, do you love the God who was revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ?

Yes, you know that we do.

Then take care of God's children.

Children of God, do you love the God who breathes new life into us even as we gather this day?

Yes, you know that we do.

Then feed God's children.¹

Call to Worship (Option 3)

Leader: Christ asked Peter if he loved him.

People: Peter affirmed three times his love of the Lord.

L: Christ asks us if we love him.

P: We affirm our love of the Lord in our worship.

L: Christ calls us to demonstrate our love in service.

P: Lord, help us to witness to your love in the ways in which we care for others. Amen.²

1. © Katherine Hawker. Used with permission.

2. From Ministry Matters by Nancy C. Townley, ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3724/worship-connection. Used with permission.

Opening Prayer (Option 1)

Generous God, giver of every good and perfect gift, we lift our voices today to express our thanks and praise. For health and strength, for family and friends, for our homes and this church community, and for your abiding and life-giving presence, we say thank you. For your love, which knows no bounds, and for empowering us to share your love with others, we sing your praise. Make us deeply aware of your presence today as we gather together to worship, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Opening Prayer (Option 2)

Loving and generous God, you are the fount of every blessing, the source of all we have. Your breath gives us life, your love gives us courage and strength, healing and compassion. You care for us like a loving parent and you feed our spirits, our minds, and our bodies. We thank you for your abundance given freely to all.

But God, forgive us for wanting more, even when we have more than we need. Create in us new hearts to love our neighbours as much as we love ourselves. Help us to know that our abundance is for others' needs. Great Teacher, write your law on our hearts. God's abundance is enough for all if we share.

From "Liturgy for a Labor Sunday Service" by the Rev. Ed Middleton, Cocoa Beach Community Church, United Church of Christ. Used with permission.

Hymn/Song of Praise

"Come, Let Us Sing" (*Voices United* 222) or "We Praise You, God" (VU 218)

Children's Time (*See p. 104.*)

Responsive Psalm

Psalm 138 (VU p. 860)

Scripture Lesson

John 21:15–19

Anthem

Sermon

Show Me (*See p. 101.*)

Hymn

“Jesus, You Have Come to the Lakeshore” (VU 563)

or “Will You Come and Follow Me” (VU 567)

Prayers of the People

Creating God, we thank you for the gift that is life: for the changing seasons, for the tiny seeds that in your Holy Mystery become life-sustaining food, cleansed air, beauty to behold, and life itself.

We thank you for the gift of life.

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of family, friends, and community—those who know us so well that they know when to hold our hand and when to let go. We thank you for those people who journey with us in our times of joy and especially in our times of sorrow.

We thank you for the gift of love.

Compassionate God, we thank you for holding us in troubling times. We pray for those who are journeying through illness, awaiting medical diagnosis, those with life-threatening and degenerative diseases. We know that we do not journey alone but that you are always with us.

We thank you for the gift of compassion.

Challenging God, we thank you for writing your law upon our hearts so that we are called to seek justice and to love kindness. Thank you for moving us to action and challenging us to be your hands and feet in a world so desperately in need of healing.

We thank you for the gift of challenge.

God of all time and place, we thank you for the gifts of life, love, compassion, and challenge. Help us to know that each small individual action together with another’s can make a difference to the world and make a world of difference. May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

We thank you for the gift of our call to discipleship.

Let us join our hearts, minds, and voices together as we pray the prayer our Saviour taught...⁴

The Lord’s Prayer

4. “Prayers of the People” by Cheryl Curtis and Faith March-MacCuish, from Sunday 3 Worship in We Sing Thanksgiving (*Called to Be the Church*, program for 2017–2018), page 81. Used with permission.

Minute for Mission

(Search “Stories of Our Mission” at united-church.ca.)

Offertory Invitation

God’s blessings are all around us. For all that we have and for all that we are, we give God thanks and praise. We are now given an opportunity to be blessing to others. Through our PAR commitments, through our money, and through our time and talents, we now return to God, so that we might be a part of God’s love and God’s mission.

Our offering will now be received.

Offertory Prayer (Option 1)

Gracious God, you call us to respond to your love with love. Accept these gifts we bring, and accept us that, together, we might be able to show your love and transform the lives of your people, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Offertory Prayer (Option 2)

God of gift and giftedness, hear our prayers and receive this offering.

In these plates, along with monies given through PAR, is our offering, a reflection of our “glad and generous hearts.” By your blessing and our labours may this offering be transformed into food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothing for the naked, community for the lonely. And, through our ministries, may your good news be heard, your peace be felt, and your love be known. Amen!

Bill Thomas and Cheryl Wood-Thomas, “Prayer of Dedication,” in Sunday 2 Worship in We Sing Thanksgiving (*Called to Be the Church*, program for 2017–2018), page 72. Used with permission.

Closing Hymn

“Take My Life and Let It Be” (VU 506) or “When Hands Reach Out Beyond Divides” (*More Voices* (MV) 169)

Commissioning and Benediction

Leader: Our worship is over, but now our service begins. We are called to go and live God’s love in the world.

People: We go in faith and in hope to feed Christ’s sheep and care for Christ’s lambs.

L: Go in peace, and may the love of God embrace us, the compassion of Christ challenge us, and the Holy Spirit guide us.

P: Amen.

Sermon: Show Me

John 21:15–19

The story is told about a farmer who, on one warm summer night, was sitting on the front porch with his wife. The couple had been together for over 40 years. On that particular night, the farmer began to think about how much he appreciated his partner. They had shared so much together. She had been caring, supportive, patient, and forgiving. Overcome with emotion, he turned to her and said, “Wife, you have been such a wonderful partner that there are times I can hardly keep from telling you!”

Love and gratitude are wonderful emotions, but particularly so when they are spoken, when we express them aloud. The phrases, “Thank you,” “I really appreciate it,” “I really appreciate you,” and “I love you,” are very powerful. These words have the potential to grow our love and strengthen our relationships. To not express those feelings aloud is, therefore, an opportunity lost. And yet, the truth is that many of us do not express our love and gratitude very much at all. Even as a church community we don’t always say it enough. It is not that we don’t love one another, it is not that we don’t appreciate each other and what we do for God’s mission here at (*name of your church*), it is just that we don’t say it enough.

Note: Here, the preacher might take the opportunity to offer specific thanks to the members of the congregation and/or have members thank one another. For example: “So today, in this spirit, I thought that we might begin our time of reflection with a little thanksgiving. I would ask you right now, if you are comfortable, to turn to your neighbours and say ‘Thank you for being here, and thank you for all the ways you live out your faith here in this church.’ (*Give time for people to respond.*) Let me now say to each one of you, Thank you so much for your presence, and for the many ways you contribute to the life and mission of this church. Your time, your sharing of talents and leadership, and your contributions to both our local ministry and Mission & Service change lives every day and are very much appreciated. We are less without you. I am so grateful to be here, in ministry with all of you. Thank you!”

Expressing our love and gratitude in words is important and often powerful. You want to know something else? It also helps us, we who do the thanking! Indeed, there are many recent studies that show that focusing on our abundance and expressing our gratitude regularly make us happier and healthier as individuals and stronger as a church community. Diana Butler Bass, in her wonderful book called *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*, sums it up beautifully: “In addition to heart health, gratitude has also been linked to emotional well-being, lower levels of anxiety and depression, decreased panic attacks and phobias, reduced risks of alcoholism and substance abuse, and longevity (yes, grateful people live longer). Researchers found that thankful people live happier lives as well.”⁵ So bottom line—don’t be shy! Say thank you! Say it often!

5. From *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*, by Diana Butler Bass, Harper-One, 2018, page 29. Used with permission.

While focusing on our gratitude and expressing it aloud is necessary, we all know, however, that it doesn't end there. Love and gratitude must also be lived out—expressed in our actions. We all know of cases where someone says “I love you so much,” but their actions are not consistent with their words. They give a mixed message. And we also know that when messages are mixed, people believe our actions over our words. So it is key to both say it and live it.

So, how do we express our love and gratitude to God?

We can say it aloud and we do, regularly, through prayers, storytelling, and singing. Indeed, when you think of it, our worship services are often full of words of thanksgiving. But what about our actions? How do we show God thanks and love? For instance, when we have those incredible moments of thankfulness, when our hearts are overflowing with gratefulness and praise, what can we do to express our love and gratitude to God?

Actually, Jesus had something to say about that. When asked once what God expected of a believer, he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.... And...” here it comes “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37, 39)

Neither of those two commands were new to Jesus' listeners. What was new was the way Jesus linked the two, in essence, saying to people, “You want to express your love to God? Then love one another, love your neighbour. Want to express sincere gratitude for all that God has done for you? Then reach out and care for all those God loves.”

In today's lesson from John's gospel we get a similar message. Jesus is speaking to Peter. It is after the resurrection. Jesus is about to leave this earth and he wants to ensure that the disciples understand their mission. It is so important. Jesus asks Peter not once, not twice, but three times, “Do you love me?” And each time, Peter says aloud, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus wants Peter to show him and says, “Feed my lambs” “Tend my sheep” “Feed my sheep.” In other words, if Peter wants to express his love for Jesus, he should show him and love those whom Jesus loves.

You may recall that it wasn't so long before today's story that Peter was similarly asked about his relationship with Jesus. It was the night when Jesus was arrested. Then, also three times, Peter denied he knew Jesus. In the days after the crucifixion, we can imagine that this would have played heavy on Peter's heart. But here is Jesus giving Peter a path for healing and an opportunity to get it right—to proclaim that not only does he know Jesus, but he loves him.

In the days to come we know that many people will come to faith in God, not just because of Peter's words, but because of how he lived his life from this moment on. His actions will speak loudly and reinforce his words. Eventually, Peter will give up his very life for the sake of Jesus. Now that is speaking loudly through your actions!

(continued)

Let me offer one final point. When we live our love as well as speak it, we are following God's example. God tells us and then shows us. That is the central message of the story of Jesus. For the modern mind, it is unbelievable to imagine God coming to the earth as a human being; taking on our limitations, our pain, our suffering, our doubts, and our fears. Coming to the world to tell us, but most importantly to show us, an incredible, life-transforming and never-ending love. God, in Jesus, came to show us that which God had been repeating for centuries through the Hebrew leaders and prophets—we are loved, and God will be with us no matter what. Here for us, here with us, changing our very lives forever with love.

My friends, today, God's love still needs flesh and bone. Today, God still needs people to show others God's love and care. Indeed, as Christ's followers in our time and place, we are called, in grateful response to God's love and abundance, to be nothing less than the hands and feet of God—making a difference in the lives of others, particularly those in need, for Jesus' sake. God promises to be with us in this endeavour. Through the Holy Spirit, God promises to help us show this love, God's love.

There is a wonderful story told of a little girl walking home from church one Sunday with her mom. At one point, the little girl turns to her mother and says, "Mommy, the minister's sermon this morning confused me." The mother said, "Oh? Why is that?" The little girl replied, "Well, she said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, honey, that is true." "And the minister said that God lives in us. Is that true, Mommy?" The mother replied, "Yes, that is also true." "Well," said the little girl, "if God is bigger than us, and lives in us, wouldn't God show through?"

Today, on this Gratitude Sunday, we take time to reflect on God's love, God's grace, and God's abundant blessings in our individual lives, and in the life of this faith community. Today, in a spirit of gratitude, we will pause to give God thanks for all that we have, and all that we are. But let us also take this day and the days ahead to show God our gratitude by letting God's love shine through us to bless others.

Friends, may God's Spirit be with each of us and with our congregation as we seek to grow our faith, our love, and our impact in this coming year. The world is waiting. God's people need us—and what we can give. May God bless us through our words and may God's people be blessed through our actions. Amen.

Children's Time

Have on hand:

- One large and one small package of Smarties or M&Ms or other snack that is easily shared
- A printout of the Mission & Service 2019 map, available for download at bit.ly/m_smap2019.

Welcome everyone and tell them that today you have a special treat to share. Take out the large bag of candy. Ask children to cup their hands together and hold them out. For the first child, pour candy into their hands until the candies overflow. As you distribute the candy to the next child, give the second child less. Move along the line giving each child less candy than the child before. Make sure there are at least two children with no candy.

Ask the children what they think about the uneven distribution of the candy. Wait for responses. If there is no response, ask specific individuals how they feel. Begin with the person with the most candy. Ask those who received none how they feel.

Tell the group that this is very similar to what happens in the world every day. Some of God's people get plenty of food and plenty of things. In fact, they get more than enough. Others get less, but still plenty. And still others get very little of what they need to survive. Some children go to bed with nothing in their bellies; many children get sick because they don't have enough.

Display the Mission & Service map of the world. Explain that for many reasons people in different parts of the world get a different share of all the food and things that are produced in the world. Point to Canada and say, "For us in Canada, many more of us have lots. Now, there are still poor people in Canada, but not as many poor people as there are in other places."

Point to another place on the map where the people don't have enough because of droughts, wars, political instability, climate changes, and/or other reasons. If possible have pictures of the poor conditions in which some people in the world are forced to live.

Wonder with the children as to how we might be able to change things for the better. Wait for responses.

Share: "I am happy to tell you that we in the United Church are big on sharing and helping others. Did you notice that every week people bring their offering? Well, that money is money we share to help people—both near and far away—so that they might have better lives. As the United Church, we support partners and programs that make a difference in people's lives. Have you heard of Mission & Service? This is how all United Churches all across the country, and in Bermuda, pool their money together in one big pot. And the only plan for that money is to help other people who need it. Isn't that cool? (*Indicate the map again.*) On this map we can see all the places in the world where we are helping people help themselves so they can have a better life."

If the group has already shared their candy, thank them for sharing. If they have not, use the small bag of candy to ensure that each child receives a fair share.

Prayer

Dear God, you are kind and generous. You give us so much. We pray today for those who have so little. Help us to share. Help us to help others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

FULL PROGRAM GUIDES AND WORSHIP SERIES ARE ALL ONLINE

Program: united-church.ca/stewardship

Worship: united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship

4. Additional Resources

Coaching and Support

Called to Be the Church: The Journey

Called to Be the Church: The Journey offers tailored and topical modules with coaching and ongoing support to meet your stewardship needs. Each module has a specific focus enabling you to set goals, create a plan, and be successful.

Module 1: Stewardship Best Practices

- Know the best practices for increasing revenue and growing generous disciples.
- Begin implementing a plan for your next steps along the stewardship journey with your community of faith.

Module 2: The Giving Program

- Invite people to intentionally and prayerfully consider their giving.
- Run a successful congregational giving program.
- Increase financial resources available to your community of faith.

God's Mission—Our Gifts

Subscribe to this free monthly e-newsletter for up-to-date stewardship tips, tools, and ideas; registration information about *Called to Be the Church: The Journey* modules; as well as Mission & Service stories and ideas because your gifts matter! Subscribe at united-church.ca/e-newsletters.

Questions and Advice

If you get stuck, have a question, or want to ask for advice, please connect with us.

E-mail called@united-church.ca

Phone: **1-800-268-3781 ext. 2737**

Facebook Community

facebook.com/groups/1497896833864628/

We have formed a Facebook community for leaders engaged in congregational giving and stewardship ministry. We **inspire** our congregants to tell the story of God's action in our lives, in our community, and in the world; we **invite** others to join us in generously responding to God's call to mission; and we **thank**, expressing our heartfelt gratitude for all the gifts we see and receive. We support one another along the way.

Webinars

unitedinlearning.ca

We offer webinars through United in Learning to help get you started or to keep moving in this important ministry.

Videos

Sermon Videos

Need to have the Lent sermon series delivered? We have Licensed Lay Worship Leader Joy Bott preaching five sermons by the Rev. Dave Jagger from the *Loving Our Neighbours: Worship for Five Sundays of Lent* series.

Week 1: How to Say No!

drive.google.com/file/d/1HL-x8E1mCVlio01iPKQKPLptNGa6yOZh/view

Week 2: Bless You!

drive.google.com/file/d/1Sz4m-cB8ySLBiJKLX1voYWFNzEsu1Rhm/view

Week 3: Worship—Are You a Regular?

drive.google.com/file/d/15cJ49-izzl4RY53oXygFzrsanFVAHWsd/view

Week 4: I've Had Enough!

drive.google.com/file/d/1h8uhHKCN8sdheBsKejpswWqIF9eDENnq/view

Week 5: Who'd Have Thunk It?

drive.google.com/file/d/1SoCWNRTVaKzllrHVyD69AWZtxwvKPyoE/view

Videos for Congregational Leadership

The *Called to Be the Church: The Journey* playlist on The United Church of Canada YouTube channel has an assortment of videos to encourage, teach, and inspire your community of faith: youtube.com/c/unitedchurchofcanada/playlists.

Discipleship Resource



I Intend is a discipleship program for congregations and individuals. The program guide and accompanying workbook for participants offers opportunities for individuals, groups, or whole congregations to grow in their capacity to be disciples and followers of Jesus. It helps people make practical choices in five areas of their lives to help them live generously, faithfully, and intentionally. Based in the Baptismal Covenant it can be implemented as a Lenten program or used over any six-week period. It fosters spiritual growth, offers a holistic understanding of the life of faith, and proposes practical and specific spiritual practices for daily living. Each area and session gives the individual an opportunity to:

- Reflect on their life
- Ask some key questions
- Discern God's call for faithful living
- Decide on suitable spiritual practices
- Record the practices in Intention Statements
- Begin living generously and intentionally as a disciple of Christ

I Intend is available in Downloads at united-church.ca/stewardship.

Remember, this is only week 1 of each worship series used in the *Called to Be the Church Congregational Giving Program*. Download the rest of the materials from united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship.



We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope. Amen.
—from A New Creed

