Called to Be the Church Congregational Giving Program

Season of Gratitude: World Communion Sunday  
to All Saints’ Sunday

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# Introduction

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

The children’s curriculum includes youth activities/discussion points as well as an all-ages children’s program and a children’s time for worship. Children’s program activities are based on stories from the gospels and include circle time sharing, hands-on activity stations, story book and/or video or discussion suggestions, and games.

**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 the third Sunday in the series, 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 four, 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.

# Sunday 1, World Communion Sunday: Individual Life of Faith

## Worship Service

*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

(*including an 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.

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_CHILDREN’S_PROGRAM:_INDIVIDUAL)*.*)

### 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

**Psalm 104:1–13, 24*a***

1 Peter 2:1–5

Luke 12:32–34

### Choir Anthem or Hymn

### Sermon

Wisdom to Wonder and Share (*See* [*below*](#_SERMON:_WISDOM_TO)*.*)

### 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”*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/generosity-through-mission-and-service/stories-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

*Based on Psalm 104*

Psalm 104 paints a picture. You can imagine the canvas being filled in as it 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), he declares.

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 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 it 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 just 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 you (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.

#### Lesson

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 you have set up 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 back pack 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 like 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 suggested activity 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?
* Recount 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 cutout (see websites below for templates) 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!](https://thebiblemademedoit.com/)
* [Artists Helping Children](https://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/)

### 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 the story from several different versions or, after reading the story, invite the youth to dramatize it. Or they might choose and discuss a character from the story with whom they identify.

#### Discussion questions following scripture

* If you could hear anything from God, what message 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](http://thekindnessproject.ca/) 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, the neighbourhood, and the youths’ 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 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 and 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.

# 

# Sunday 2, Thanksgiving Sunday: Our Congregation’s Mission

## Worship Service

### We Gather

### Prelude

“Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom” (*More Voices* 10) or “Come Touch Our Hearts” (MV 12)

### Greeting/Welcome

(*including Acknowledging 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 retreat and refuge, worship and wonder.

**All: It is good to be here.**

One: It is good to be together.

**All: Let us prepare to worship God.**

### Lighting of Christ Candle

(*if this is the congregation’s tradition*)

We light this candle to remind us that God’s house glows with love and light and that the Risen Christ is always with us. Amen.

### Call/Invitation to Worship

One: God says, “I will fill your cup and then some.”

**All: We come now to receive.**

One: Jesus says, “I bring abundant life to all.”

**All: We come now to share.**

One: Spirit says, “I fill your hearts with love.”

**All: We come now to love.**

One: Let us worship God.

### 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 our spirits for the road ahead.  
We gather to learn the wisdom of your way and feel the warmth of your love.  
Bless our gathering as we join our hearts and minds together in worship. Amen.**

### Hymn

“Let Us Build a House” (MV 1) or “We Praise You, O God” (*Voices United* 218)

### Children’s Time

### Hymn

“Jesus, Friend of Little Children” (VU 340) or “Jesus Loves Me” (VU 365)

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_CHILDREN’S_PROGRAM)*.*)

### We Receive the Word

### Prayer for Illumination

Generous God, we give you thanks for the inspiration and guidance of your Word. May we hear these words from the psalmist newly and may we ground ourselves in your wisdom and your way. Amen.

### Scripture

Proverbs 3:1–18

**Psalm 26**

Philippians 4:6–7

Mark 10:13–16

### Choir Anthem or Musical Reflection

### Sermon

Wisdom for the Road (*See* [*below*](#_Sunday_2:_SERMON)*.*)

### Hymn

“We Are Pilgrims” (VU 595) or “Sisters Let Us Walk Together” (MV 179)

### We Respond

### Announcements

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

### Minute for Mission

(*Search* [*“Stories of Our Mission”*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/generosity-through-mission-and-service/stories-our-mission) *at united-church.ca.*)

### Invitation to the Offering

Now in response to God’s love and generosity, let us take up our offering in support of the mission and ministry of our congregation and the Mission and Service of our wider church.

### Offertory Hymn

“Ev’ry Day Is a Day of Thanksgiving” (MV 185) or “Grateful” (MV 182)

### Prayer of Dedication

(*all together*)

**Like the psalmist, gracious God, we love living with you and we are grateful for our many blessings. We love knowing that you are present with us as we journey through life. With thanksgiving in our hearts, we pray that our gifts of time, talent, and treasure will bless our neighbours, near and far. Amen.**

### Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God,  
move us to thanksgiving,  
not because of all that we have received,   
but because of your love of us.

Move us to thanksgiving,  
not only for the bounty of the harvest,  
but for your ongoing presence in the world   
and your promise of abundant life for all.  
Move us to thanksgiving, not just today, but every day.

Let our thanksgiving be expressed in our generosity.   
Let our thanksgiving be expressed in our service.  
Let our thanksgiving be expressed in our compassion  
as we take a moment now to offer the prayers of our hearts in silence...

(*silent prayer*)

May our cups overflow with gratitude and compassion as we gather our prayers using the words that Jesus taught us so long ago….[[1]](#footnote-1)

### The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

### We Are Sent Out

### Commissioning

In the spirit of Thanksgiving,  
go into the world, this week,  
determined to share God’s lavish love with all whom you encounter. Go love God,  
go love yourselves, and  
 go love others,  
knowing that God goes the way with you.  
**All: Thanks be to God!**

### Hymn

“We Are Marching” (VU 646) or “Go, Make a Diff’rence” (MV 209)

### Benediction

May you be blessed with an unwavering trust in God.   
May you walk with integrity in the way of Jesus.  
And may the Spirit of God inspire and guide you all your days. Amen.

### Postlude

## Sermon: Wisdom for the Road

*Based on Psalm 26*

I bet various people in your life have imparted wisdom to you, maybe in the form of sage sayings. One of my family members was fond of saying, “Everyone puts their pants on one leg at a time.” My mother has often advised, “Never go to bed angry.” My grandfather, a carpenter, was fond of saying, “Measure twice. Cut once.” (*The preacher inserts their own examples*.)

(*The preacher might invite the congregation to share some of their kernels of wisdom aloud or with each other, e.g., “If you have a nugget of wisdom that has been passed on to you, I would invite you to share it with the person sitting beside you.”*)

The imparting of wisdom is likely as key in your life as it has been in mine. We need to know the best way to brush our teeth, to wash our clothes, to share, to live a life.

(*Soloist or choir spontaneously sings the following refrain or it might be played.*)

May God who creates you give you light.  
May God who sustains you make you wise.   
May God who protects you give you joy.  
May God who surrounds you give you peace.

It’s no wonder that wisdom is such a prominent feature in the Hebrew scripture. Our life depends on one generation imparting wisdom to the next and vice versa.

In the Bible, wisdom literature and wisdom sayings are guidelines for faith, a kind of instruction manual in how to live the good life. The words from Deuteronomy “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30: 19) outline what wisdom literature tries to do. It aims to set us on the right path. It especially comes in handy when we feel lost.

Often, wisdom is shared in times when we especially need it. I was reminded that everyone puts their pants on one leg at a time when I was feeling intimidated by someone whom I perceived as more powerful and capable. I was reminded not to go to bed angry when I was in the heat of an argument. I was told to measure twice and cut once when I was going too fast for my own good.

Tension (or the potential for tension) often precipitates the imparting of wisdom. Psalm 26 is couched in tension. From the outset, there is a cry for vindication. There’s something off. Some scholars think Psalm 26 was written after the exile when the writer or writers were feeling particularly challenged—the perfect time for wisdom!

While the psalm is traditionally seen as a type of liturgy, there is a great deal of evidence that it is a piece of wisdom literature. It bears many of the same hallmarks as literature found in the Book of Proverbs, especially in its themes and form. (*The preacher might want to invite the congregation to follow along in their pew Bibles or on a bulletin insert with the passage printed on it.*)

For example, Psalm 26 has a concentric structure typical of wisdom literature. It is very carefully crafted to circle back on itself. So, verses 1–3 have to do with right walking. Verses 4–5 discuss how the psalmist disassociates from wickedness. Verses 6–8 talks about ritual purity and liturgy. And then the psalm circles back to the beginning. Verses 9–10 have to do with how the psalmist isn’t destroyed by the wicked. And verses 11–12 return to right walking.

That idea of “right walking” or “being on the right route” or the potential to go one of two ways—the way of the righteous or the way of the wicked is a core metaphor in wisdom literature. We heard it in Deuteronomy 30:“Life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life.” Some believe such as choice is suggested in Robert Frost “The Road Not Taken.”

There’s never a doubt in the scripture that we are on a journey. From the Garden of Eden to the book of Revelation and all points in between, God’s people are on the move. Psalm 26 is no less busy. The psalmist talks about walking in faithfulness, going around the altar, walking in integrity, standing on level ground as opposed to (in verses 4 and 5) sitting with the worthless or the wicked—hitting a dead end. Righteousness is going with God.

Psalm 26 is truly wisdom for the road.

(*Soloist or choir spontaneously sings the following refrain or it might be played.*)

May God who creates you give you light.  
May God who sustains you make you wise.   
May God who protects you give you joy.  
May God who surrounds you give you peace.

The wisdom we hear from the old words of Psalm 26 may sound like the wisdom that you thought about at the beginning of this sermon and which you shared with the person next to you. It might sound like something your aunt or your mother or your friend shared with you in a time of uncertainty or stress. In our congregational life, it might sound like the wisdom that comes when we pray or sing in one voice, or when we sit around our decision-making tables and decide where to direct our human resources and financial resources that they might have the most positive impact in our community and world.

That’s how I would invite us to listen to the wisdom in these psalms—as though a trusted friend or mentor or respected congregant was passing the wisdom on to us. Listen to the paraphrase of Psalm 26 in that knowing, loving tone:

Go with God.  
Move with faithfulness.  
Don’t waste your time on stuff that detracts you from what is holy.  
Sing.  
Be thankful.  
Wonder.  
Have integrity.  
Stay grounded.  
Go with God.

Now, each one of us here knows that our ability to receive words of wisdom is directly proportional to the venue in which they are shared. For example, some wisdom may be imparted to us across a kitchen table over a steaming cup of coffee. Or wisdom may be given when we are sweating buckets of distress, and the words shared with us hit us right in the heart, and we are instantly calm.

Where do you imagine you would be, to be most open to hearing God’s words of wisdom from Psalm 26? When are you most receptive to hearing such words of wisdom?

Maybe during a quiet moment by a lake? Or in the midst of the joyful bustle of friends over Thanksgiving dinner? Maybe in a moment of prayer when you are like a child curled up on Jesus’ lap as described in today’s reading from the Gospel of Mark. In whatever circumstance you think you are most apt to be impressed by God’s wisdom, imagine being there. Close your eyes if it feels comfortable. Listen to the Spirit speak to you now:

Go with God.  
Move with faithfulness.  
Don’t waste your time on stuff that detracts you from what is holy.  
Sing.  
Be thankful.  
Wonder.  
Have integrity.   
Stay grounded.   
Go with God.

(*Soloist or choir spontaneously sings the following refrain or it might be played.*)

May God who creates you give you light.  
May God who sustains you make you wise.  
 May God who protects you give you joy.  
May God who surrounds you give you peace.  
May we know the deepest blessing of God on the road of life.   
May God’s wisdom make us wise.  
May we be thankful.  
 Amen.

## Children’s Program

### Scripture

Mark 10:13‒16 Jesus Welcomes Children

### Theme: We are grateful for our faith

*Worshipping as an entire community of faith provides meaningful experiences for children in worship. You might invite children to participate in the opening liturgical moments of the service, including sharing a Call to Worship 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 just fortunate enough to “listen in”), so it is important to use language and themes that are age-appropriate, including giving special consideration the ways that scripture and prayer are offered.*

### Scripture Story

Share today’s gospel lesson using the *Spark Story Bible*, page 328 (Sparkhouse Publishing, ISBN 9780806670492).

### Children’s Sermon: You Are Welcome Here!

#### Moral

Children are welcome and an important part of our church family.

#### Supplies

A welcome mat or welcome flag or photos depicting “Welcome” signs

#### Lesson

Ask the children if they have ever seen welcome signs/mats/flags like those you are sharing with them. Where else have they seen the word welcome? What does it mean when you are welcome somewhere? It is a good thing to see the word “welcome,” especially when you are travelling, or looking for help, or wanting to find a friendly face.

Welcome means that you have found a place where you are safe and where people are glad to have you there.

Where are some places that you are always welcome? You are always welcome in your home, in your school, and you are always welcome here in your church. These are places where you are loved and where you are important and where you have a special role to play. We are all welcome here. We are always so glad to see you here at church. You are an important part of our church family.

When we are together in worship each week, we have a special time for our children. We gather together and learn with each other about how we can be followers of Jesus. Today, we heard a story of another time when children were getting together to learn about being a follower of Jesus. It was when Jesus was alive on earth and he was teaching people about God. Parents were bringing their children to see Jesus, so that they could learn from him and so that he could bless them, tell them how important and special they were. Some of Jesus’ friends tried to send the children away. They said that Jesus was too busy to spend time with children and that they didn’t matter to him. Jesus did not agree. He told the grown-ups “Let the children come to me and don’t stop them. God really loves children and I think they are very important!”

What Jesus said is very true. God loves each of you very much, and you help to make our church family feel whole. You have a special place in God’s heart and in our hearts. Over the next few weeks we are going to be thinking about how it is that we can help other people feel God’s love and help them to feel welcome. We will hear stories of Jesus and will think about how we can follow his example, sharing what we have so that everyone will know that they are welcome.

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

Dear God,

Thank you for making us feel welcome at home, at school, and at church. Help us to share your love with other people so that everyone will feel important and special. Amen.

*Following the children’s sermon, the children are invited to 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 suggested activities. Feel free to supplement the suggested activities with other activities suitable to your context. Offering stations with puzzles, playdough, Lego, books, colouring opportunities, stickers, etc. allows children to be engaged in a variety of ways each week.*

### Children’s Book

*The Secret of Saying Thanks*by Douglas Wood (written for ages 4‒8)

In a spiritual homage to nature, home, and family, acclaimed children’s author Douglas Wood offers poetic insight into the secret of gratitude. With gentle prose and pictures, this book highlights all the things in the world—some obvious and some we might not often think about—for which we can offer thanks. It is a beautiful book to share at Thanksgiving, and to help us focus attention on the true secret of gratitude…that the more we say thanks, the more we find to be thankful for.

#### Reflection questions

* In the story, what was the picture/idea that you liked best?
* When do you say “Thank you”? Who do you say it to?
* Is it easy to remember to be grateful?
* What are different ways to say “Thank you”? (There are lots of suggestions in the story!)
* How can we say “Thank you” to God? (Examples include: prayers, how we live our lives, sharing with others.)

### Activity: Gratitude Game

Today’s lesson is about being grateful. And, since it is close to Thanksgiving, it is an appropriate way to engage the children in counting their blessings.

#### You will need

* A large number of six different-coloured objects (straws, pompoms, blocks, beads, pipe cleaners, etc.)
* A die or number spinner
* Colour chart showing which colour represents each item (see list below)

#### How to play

Place the objects in a pile. Have the children take turns rolling the die or spinning a number. Then invite the child whose turn it is to take that number of objects from the pile. Once every child has a pile of objects, invite them to share with the group things they are grateful for based on the number and colour of objects they have. For example, if they have a red straw, they can name a food they are grateful for. If they have two yellow beads, they can name two animals they are grateful for. Depending on the age of the children, they can share a little about why they are grateful for each item. If the children need to be more active, you could use coloured eggs/pompoms hidden around your room and have the children go on a hunt to find the objects instead of just choosing them from a pile.

#### Take it one step further

Invite the children to use their coloured objects to make a Gratitude Collage or Gratitude Sculpture.

#### Colour chart

Red Name a food that you are grateful for

Blue Name a person you are grateful for

Yellow Name an animal you are grateful for

Purple Name a place you are grateful for

Green Name a thing you are grateful for

Orange Child’s choice

### Craft: Giving Thanks Pumpkin

*Once the children have had an opportunity to think about the things they are grateful for, they can create a table centerpiece for Thanksgiving.*

Check out Cloister.org’s [Faithful Little Hands website](https://cloister.org/faithful-little-hands/post/4mn2zok7/Thanksgiving-Gratitude-Pumpkin:Personalized-Handprint-Kids-Craft) for full instructions and pictures.

You will need:

* green construction paper
* orange construction paper strips of 20 cm x 5 cm with holes punched in each end (10 strips per child)
* green pipe cleaners
* markers
* hole punch
* scissors

Trace the child’s hand on green paper and cut out the outline. Have the child write (or help them write) “I am thankful for…” on the handprint. This will be the “leaf” for their pumpkin.

Have/help the children write one thing they are thankful for on each orange strip (food, God, family etc.).

Stack together all the strips, writing side UP.

Line up the holes and feed a pipe cleaner through one set of holes. Secure the pipe cleaner (by bending or taping it) to one end.

Bend the stack of strips into a “C” shape and feed the pipe cleaner through the other set of holes, then add on the handprint “leaf”. Bend or tape the pipe cleaner in place. Curl the remaining end of the pipe cleaner around a pencil to make it look like a vine.

Spread the curved strips around the pipe cleaner so that it forms a sphere. You should now have a sphere shaped orange pumpkin with the words of gratitude facing out, and a “thankful” leaf on the top.

### Youth Activity: Gratitude Journals

*At a stage in life when it is easy for youth to name their challenges and disappointments, cultivating a practice of giving thanks is important. While there are times these acts of gratitude may take on an overtly “spiritual” nature (saying grace at dinner, prayers), whenever it is that we share our gratitude with those around us, we are honouring God. Today’s lesson will help you find reasons for being grateful and will offer youth a way to express their gratitude.*

Share the scripture lesson with the youth. You might read the story from several different versions or, after reading the story, invite the youth to dramatize it. Or they might choose and discuss a character from the story with whom they identify.

#### Discussion questions following scripture

* What are you grateful for?
* How do you express gratitude?
* How does it feel to be told “Thank you”?
* When is giving thanks difficult?
* What are ways that you see gratitude being shared in the church?

#### Activity

Have the youth prepare their own Gratitude Journals, either by making journals from scratch or decorating store-bought blank journals with duct tape, stickers, ribbon, and drawings. Invite youth to consider different ways to express gratitude by putting headings at the top of each page to help inspire them (e.g., Foods I am grateful for, People I am grateful for, It was awesome when…, Different ways to say “Thank you,” Top five things I am grateful for, etc.). Encourage the youth to spend 5 minutes each day writing or drawing in their Gratitude Journals.

# Sunday 3, World Food Sunday: Our Denomination’s Mission

## Worship Service

*The key to this service is the juxtaposition of anguish and lament in Psalm 22 and the hope and solace of Psalm 23. The sense of hearing will be emphasized. The psalmist cries out to be heard, just as we sometimes long to be heard. In lieu of a ritual during the service, have members of your pastoral care team set up a listening post (one or two chairs or a bench) in the sanctuary, a place where congregants can go, sit, and be heard. After the sermon (or during), invite people to go and occupy a chair if they feel so moved.*

### We Gather

### Prelude

### Introit

“Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (*Voices United* 400)

### Greeting/Welcome

(*including Acknowledging the Traditional Territory*)

Welcome in the name of the Christ.  
Welcome to this place of worship, situated on the Traditional lands of the \_\_\_\_ people(s).  
If you come here today full of cause for celebration, you are welcome.   
If you come here today full of questions, you are welcome.  
If you come here today full of sorrow or grief, you are welcome.  
However you have come, from wherever you have come, you are most welcome here.  
Let us prepare to worship the God who welcomes everyone.

### Lighting of Christ Candle

(*if this is the congregation’s tradition*)

We light this candle defiantly, courageously, boldly, to help us remember that the shadow of lament and rage and sorrow do not last forever. The light of Christ is still there, always there, even when we cannot see it. Thanks be to God.

### Call/Invitation to Worship

One: Sometimes, God, we need to gather to lament.

**All: We come ready to trust you with our grief.**

One: Sometimes, God, we need to gather to rage.

**All: We come ready to trust you with our anger.**

One: Sometimes, God, we need to gather to witness and to weep.

**All: We come ready to trust that you will comfort us in our time of need.**

One: Sometimes, we just need to be here together and sit in the pain.

**All: And so we come ready to just be, together, and to trust you with all of who we are.**

One: Let us worship the God who loves the whole of us beyond measure and without exception.

### 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 our spirits for the road ahead.  
We gather to learn the wisdom of your way and feel the warmth of your love.  
Bless our gathering as we join our hearts and minds together in worship. Amen.**

#### Hymn

“Amazing Grace” (VU 266) or “Come and Find the Quiet Centre” (VU 374)

### Confession and Lament

Prayer of Confession (VU p. 928, Prayer A or B)

### Sung Assurance of Grace

“Don’t Be Afraid /N’ayez Pas Peur” (*More Voices* 90)

### Children’s Time

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_Children’s_Program_1)*.*)

### Choir Anthem or Musical Reflection

### We Receive the Word

### Prayer for Illumination

Holy One, as we prepare to hear the wisdom of your Word, help us to be receptive. Help us to be curious about what you might want us to hear, to feel, and to understand anew. Amen.

### Scripture

Leviticus 23:15–22

**Psalm 22:1–15** (VU p. 743) responsively

Acts 4:32–35

Matthew 19:16–21

### Sermon

Wisdom from the Bench (*See* [*below*](#_Sermon:_Wisdom_from)*.*)

### Hymn

“Psalm 23” (VU p. 747 or p. 748) or another arrangement or “Cradle Me in Your Arms/Berce-moi en tes bras” (MV 91)

### We Respond

### Announcements

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

### Minute for Mission

(*Search* [*“Stories of Our Mission”*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/generosity-through-mission-and-service/stories-our-mission) *at united-church.ca.*)

### Invitation to the Offering

When our hearts are heavy and our challenges feel daunting, it can be transformative to give to others. Let us proclaim together the power of God to sustain and bless by taking up our offering for the ministry of this community of faith and for our Mission & Service partners.

#### Offertory Hymn

“Spirit, Open My Heart” (MV 79) or “We Give Our Thanks” (MV 187)

### Prayer of Dedication

(*all together*)

**Holy and gracious God, we pray that these gifts help to bless and sustain the work of this church and its mission and ministry in our neighbourhood and in the wider world. Amen.**

### Prayers of the People

Merciful God, thank you for hearing us when we cry out to you. When pain and suffering, ours or someone else’s, seem too much to bear, help us remember that you are there with us.

**Optional bidding and response: Lord in your mercy…. Receive our prayer.**

Loving God, please help us to remember that this church is your church. Help us to live faithfully into the mission of the Church universal.

**Optional bidding and response: Lord in your mercy…. Receive our prayer.**

Gracious God, please touch our hearts that we might love the world as you do.  
Help us to steward resources faithfully, live generously, and serve others cheerfully.

**Optional bidding and response: Lord in your mercy…. Receive our prayer.**

Compassionate God, help us to accompany and care for those who are dealing with illness of the mind or body. May they receive all they need to heal and regain vitality.

**Optional bidding and response: Lord in your mercy…. Receive our prayer.**

Spirit of God, we take a moment now to remember aloud or in silence those we know and love who are suffering or celebrating in some way….  
(*time of silence*)  
Lord, in your mercy, receive the prayers of all our hearts this day. Let us now pray together the prayer that Jesus taught:

### The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

### We Are Sent Out

### Commissioning

Take time this week to talk to God and share what’s on your heart.  
Take time this week to listen and hear the heart of another.  
Take time this week to rest, just as you are, in the heart of God.  
Sharing the goodness you find there with all whom you encounter.

### Hymn

“My Soul Cries Out” (MV 120) or *\*“I Heard the Voice of Jesus” (VU 626)

### Benediction

May the grace of God enfold you,  
may the light of Christ shine upon you,  
and may the power of the Holy Spirit move in and through you,  
today and all your days.  
Amen.

### Postlude

## Sermon: Wisdom from the Bench

*Based on Psalm 22*

*The preacher sets out a single chair in the view of the congregation.*

Imagine for a moment that someone is sitting in this chair. Imagine that that person is in pain and begins to describe their suffering. They start questioning their faith: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And then for the next 18 or so sentences, they pour out their suffering: “I cry by day, but you do not answer…I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me…Many bulls encircle me…they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water…My heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast…You lay me in the dust of death…My hands and feet have shriveled” (Psalm 22:2‒16).

Heavy, isn’t it?

That’s the way Psalm 22 starts. It’s like the psalmist is sitting across from God letting the tears and frustrations flow. He is in despair.

We can all identify with that. Who of us hasn’t sat in that same chair from time to time? Suffering is part of what it means to be human.

In the account of Jesus’ crucifixion in Mark’s gospel, Jesus turns to the words of Psalm 22 to express his pain. He doesn’t just cry out to a generic God, but he cries the intimate words of the psalm: “My God, My God.” It is as though the intimacy of his relationship with God magnifies his feeling of being forsaken. It’s one thing to feel forsaken by a stranger; it’s another to feel forsaken by a loved one isn’t it?

We might imagine who in our society would echo this psalm, who sits in this chair. We can see those who are isolated, violated, broken down, left out sitting there. We hear cries like this from all sectors of our society every day. Sometimes they are so painful to listen to that we tune them out, distract ourselves, turn off the television or computer.

(*Set another chair alongside the first.*)

As hard as it is, the call of the church is to sit in the forsakenness. To sit in the pain and the suffering. To show up in the despair. To listen. To act with love. As a denomination, we do that when we listen deeply to Indigenous peoples, when we proclaim “Black lives matter,” and when we encourage everyone who has ears to listen, to pay attention to the needs of those who are relegated to the margins of society. As a denomination, we transform suffering by joining together and giving to the Mission and Service Fund so that we can make a bigger difference than we ever could on our own.

When we show up, listen, and act with love, we serve the same purpose as expressed in verses 19 to 20 in Psalm 22—the verses that form the transition from despair to hope.

Where there is hope that God is not far away. Where there is hope of help and relief from suffering.

In fact, there is such a shift in mood at verse 19 in Psalm 22 that the last part, the hopeful part, is considered a later addition, an entirely different psalm welded to the first.

At verse 19, the conversation begins to turn to hope as the psalmist articulates what he needs: “O Lord, do not be far away!” And then he remembers what God has done in his life in the past: “From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me” (v. 21). You have rescued me before. You’ve heard me cry out before. And then he flashes forward God’s promises: “Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn” (vs. 30‒31). There will be satisfaction.

There will be praise. There will be new life.” Amen to that!

But there’s another way to consider the psalm in light of justice that I want to share with you today.

Here’s the thing about doing the long, slow work of justice. (*The preacher stands between the chairs, holding both.*) While we can be the shift, the verse 19 in the struggle for justice, that shift can seem a long way off, and we can find ourselves in the seat of despair—despairing that what we are doing isn’t enough or it is too small in relation to the magnitude of problems. We can despair that we aren’t up to the task at hand or wonder whether the sacrifices and commitment are worth it.

In those grinding moments, the deliverance extolled in verse 31 seems like an impossible dream, foreign words, someone else’s story tacked on. But it is very much our story.

The genius of Psalm 22 is that it invites us to own both the lament and the praise. (*The preacher moves the chairs together so that the seats form a bench.*) To think of lament and praise less as single, isolated chairs than as a bench. Not as opposites, but as a continuum. Part of the ebb and flow of doing the work of justice. It is normal in doing anything worthwhile to slide between despair and hope. Doing God’s work is not easy. That’s why we need the scripture.

And each other. That’s why we are connected to congregations across our country. That’s why we are a “United” church. We are united in our call to join God’s mission, rejoicing together when the going is easy and encouraging each other when the work of justice is difficult.

Those who crafted books of the Bible were true artists. There is a reason why certain books are placed after others and certain chapters follow others. It’s not random.

Lounging on the bench of Psalm 22 (*the preacher may sit down on the “bench”*), we are invited to gaze out at the green pastures and the still waters of Psalm 23. God whispers to us that even in the darkest valleys, God is there:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
[God] makes me lie down in green pastures;  
[God] leads me beside still waters;  
[God] restores my soul.  
(Say it with me if you know it….)  
[God] leads me in right paths  
for [God’s] name’s sake.  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.

Sometimes we are the ones called to show up in despair, to listen and act in love. Sometimes in doing so, we can despair that what we are doing isn’t enough.

That’s when God slides alongside us, feeds and anoints us, and drapes an arm over our shoulder and says, “Goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life.”

And that communion with God is soul restoring enough to get us off the bench and take another step on the path of stewardship and justice for God’s name’s sake.

Amen.

## Children’s Program

### Scripture

Matthew 19:16‒21 – Follow Jesus

### Theme: We can follow Jesus by loving our neighbour

*Worshipping as an entire community of faith provides meaningful experiences for children in worship. You might invite children to participate in the opening liturgical moments of the service including sharing a Call to Worship 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 just 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 that scripture and prayer are offered.*

### Scripture Story

Paraphrase the scripture, explaining that in today’s story, Jesus tells a rich young ruler to “Give to the poor and follow me.”

### Children’s Sermon: Follow the Leader

#### Moral

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus?

#### Supplies

None

#### Lesson

Invite the children to play a game of Follow the Leader. You can start by being the leader, and perhaps offer other children the opportunity to be the leader. Use the whole sanctuary, moving around the space so that the congregation can be a part of the fun (giving high fives, walking backwards, going between pews, etc.). Finish the game by sitting down and having a discussion with the children.

Ask the children:

* What does it mean to be a leader?
* How does it feel to be the leader? How does it feel to be the follower?
* What kind of leader was Jesus?
* How can we be followers of Jesus?

Being a follower of Jesus means that we learn from what Jesus taught. We listen to his stories and we pay attention to how he lived his life. Jesus was a very different leader from the other people who were in charge in his time. Jesus was a leader not by being bossy or mean. He did not try to get more money or more power. Instead, Jesus cared for and loved people, especially those whom other people had forgotten. He helped people who needed it. He treated people kindly and fairly. He shared what he had and he encouraged others to do the same. When we think about how we should treat people, we can use Jesus as an example of what it means to be a good leader.

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

Dear God,  
I want to be a follower of Jesus. Help me to be loving and generous and kind. Help me to share what I have with others. Amen.

*Following the children’s sermon, the children are invited to 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 suggested activities. Feel free to supplement the suggested activities with activities suitable to your context. Offering stations with puzzles, playdough, Lego, books, colouring opportunities, stickers etc., allows children to be engaged in a variety of ways.*

### Children’s Book

*Have You Filled a Bucket Today* by Carol McCloud (written for ages 4‒8)

This popular children’s book has become a central focus of many kindergarten classrooms. The book explains that every person has a bucket that needs filling. Each one of us, by our words and actions, either helps people have their buckets filled or dips into people’s buckets. The story encourages children to become “bucket fillers” in their lives. It gives practical examples to help children understand how their actions can express kindness, appreciation, and love. This book offers tangible ways to live out Jesus’ commandment for us to serve others.

#### Reflection questions

* How does it feel when someone fills your bucket?
* What are some things you can do to fill someone’s bucket?
* What can you do if you notice someone needing to dip into another’s bucket?
* How did Jesus fill people’s buckets?
* Who are the bucket fillers in our church?

### Activity: Bucket-Filling Games

*Inspired by the book, use the ideas below or search online for other bucket-filling ideas as this theme is popular amongst children’s educators.*

* relay races to fill buckets with water/rice/sand (This will be messy so best to do it outside!)
* “pin the tail on the donkey” where you are pinning hearts to a bucket shape
* a “bean bag toss” station where you are throwing pompoms or bean bags into a bucket
* build sand castles with buckets and shovels (kinetic sand is less messy for indoors or use a large plastic bin for the sand placed on top of a plastic tablecloth for easier cleanup)

Use your creativity and the objects you have on hand to design bucket filling activities.

### Craft: Kindness Buckets

*Discuss with the children that one way we can follow Jesus’ commandment to give to others is to help fill other people’s buckets. Children have important gifts of love and service to share with others and need to be encouraged to find ways they can offer what they have in a spirit of servanthood and discipleship.*

You will need:

* metal/plastic buckets or plastic cups and pipe cleaners (one per child)
* decorations (beads, sequins, pompoms, ribbon, yarn, etc.)
* glue/hot glue
* paper or foam hearts

Have each child decorate their kindness bucket (either a real bucket, or a plastic cup with a pipe cleaner handle).

Have the children fill their buckets with kindness hearts—foam/paper hearts with kind words and loving actions written on them. Older children can come up with their own words. Have some pre-made hearts ready for younger children. Ideas include kind words (e.g., I love you, you are special, God loves you, you can do it, you have gifts to share, I like your smile, you are helpful, you are kind) and loving actions (give a hug, sweep the floor, share a toy, help with dishes, write a thank you note, share your snack, hold the door open for someone, invite a new friend to play). Encourage the children to share their kindness hearts with other people in the coming week.

### Youth Activity: The Good Human Experiment

*Encouraging our youth to find ways to think outside of themselves and to serve others is a precious responsibility for those of us gifted with caring for and raising “good humans.” We need to help youth develop their stewardship skills by realizing the skills and abilities they possess and helping them to find creative and meaningful ways to share those gifts with others.*

Share the scripture lesson with the youth. You might read several different versions, or when reading the story encourage youth to listen for words or images that stand out for them.

#### Discussion questions following scripture

* What did Jesus mean when he said we should follow him?
* What was the role of a disciple in Jesus’ time? What does that word mean to us today?
* How do you give to those who are poor?
* What gifts do you have to share?

Check out the website for The Good Human Experiment The mission of this organization is to show people how they can start a chain reaction to change the world through simple acts of kindness, empathy, and goodness. Explore their 30-day challenge, “device detox,” or blog to garner ideas on how others are engaging with this project. Brainstorm together ways that the youth individually and collectively might engage in random acts of service. Decide on one or more activities they would like to implement and make an action plan.

Start small by encouraging them to be “a good human” in the week to come and to share the results the following week. As leaders, find ways to ensure the youth are also recipients of acts of kindness so that they can experience how it feels to be served (e.g., make a treat and bring it to your gathering, invite the youth’s parents to engage in the project, mail the youth a note of encouragement).

# Sunday 4, Peace Sunday: Invitation to Everyone in Our Community to Be Part of God’s Mission

## Worship Service

*In this service, the emphasis is on actively sharing the abundance of the harvest and will employ the sense of sight. The congregation will watch the preacher move around a circle, inviting the congregants to follow visually as they preach. To further emphasize sight and vision, you could choose to create, ahead of time, a visual representation of peace and abundance, or create a short PowerPoint presentation on the same theme, or show a Mission & Service video as a way of tying the theme directly to giving to M&S.*

### We Gather

### Prelude

### Greeting/Welcome

(*including Acknowledging the Traditional Territory*)

Welcome in the name of the Christ.  
Welcome to this place of worship, situated on the Traditional lands of the \_\_\_\_ people(s).  
Welcome, you who are weary and in need of blessing.  
 God will meet you here.  
Welcome, you who wonder what the point of all this is.  
 God will meet you here.  
Welcome, you who rejoice at the abundance we have been given.   
God will meet you here! Amen.

### Lighting of Christ Candle

(*if this is the congregation’s tradition*)

By lighting this candle, we remember who we are and whose we are in Christ, and we rejoice. Amen.

### Call/Invitation to Worship

(*based on Psalm 126*)

One: Once upon a time, God, you delivered your people and gave them liberty.

**All: And now, God, do it again!**

One: You gave food to the hungry and sight to the blind.

**All: And now, God, do it again!**

One: You blessed all creatures of the Earth and declared your creation good.

**All: And now, God, do it again!**

One: As we join in worship this morning,

**All: remind us of the rain that comes after the drought to fill our lives with blessing.**

One: Come, let us worship God, giving thanks for the abundance of our lives.

### 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 our spirits for the road ahead.  
We gather to learn the wisdom of your way and feel the warmth of your love.  
Bless our gathering as we join our hearts and minds together in worship. Amen.**

### Hymn

“Draw the Circle Wide” (*More Voices* 145) or“Be Thou My Vision” (*Voices United* 642)

### Children’s Time

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_Children’s_Program_2).)

### Hymn

“Behold, Behold, I Make All Things New” (MV 115) o*r* “Open My Eyes, That I May See” (VU 371)

### We Receive the Word

### Prayer for Illumination

May these words of scripture give us new sight, new vision. May we see newly the abundance of our lives and the opportunities we have to share with our neighbours. Amen.

### Scripture

Ruth 1:1–8

**Psalm 126** (VU p. 850) responsively

Ephesians 4:11–13

Mark 10:46–52

### Choir Anthem or Musical Reflection

### Sermon

Wisdom in the Round (*See* [*below*](#_Sermon:_Wisdom_in)*.*)

### Hymn

“Come, Now, You Blessed” (VU 592) or“Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” (VU 593) or(*if you didn’t use it earlier*)“Draw the Circle Wide” (MV 145)

### We Respond

### Announcements

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

### Minute for Mission

(*Search* [*“Stories of Our Mission”*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/generosity-through-mission-and-service/stories-our-mission) *at united-church.ca.*)

### Invitation to the Offering

Now let us take up our offering with generous hearts, as we seek to draw the circle wider and wider so that one day all will be fed, all will be safe, and peace and justice will flow for all God’s creatures.

### Offertory Hymn

“Because Jesus Felt” (MV 186) or “We Give Our Thanks” (MV 187)

### Prayer of Dedication

(*all together*)

**Thank you, God, for these gifts of money, a symbol of abundance and a means of sharing generously all that we have. May this offering bless the ministry of this community of faith and our Mission & Service partners all over the world. Amen.**

### Prayers of the People

God our creator, our centre, our friend,  
we thank you for the circle of life inside which we are blessed.  
We thank you for your vision of peace and abundant life for all.  
 We are grateful for those who are dear to us,  
for those who have died,  
and for all who have helped to form and shape us.  
We take a moment now to remember those loved ones who are on our hearts this morning...  
(*silence*)  
Gracious God, most of all, we thank you for the faith that is in us,   
for our awareness of your presence,  
and for our hope in you and your ways.  
 Keep us, we pray,  
ever thankful, faithful, and hopeful now and forever...

...and now let us gather all our prayers together by praying together the words that Jesus taught his friends so long ago…[[2]](#footnote-2)

### The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

### We Are Sent Out

### Commissioning

Go boldly into the world this week, confident that by the power of God’s Spirit moving in you, you can make a difference, you can offer blessing, and you can welcome others into the circle. Let us share all that we are and all that we have so that the whole world might be blessed.

### Hymn

“I Feel the Winds of God” (VU 625) or “As Long as We Follow” (MV 140) or “Go, Make a Diff’rence” (MV 209)

### Sung Blessing

(*If possible, have someone in the choir serve as cantor for this sung blessing.)*

“Sing Amen” (VU 431)

### Postlude

## Sermon: Wisdom in the Round

*Based on Psalm 126*

*The preacher moves in a circular fashion throughout the sermon, beginning in the centre of an imagined circle.*

Do you know what it’s like to discover that your greatest dream isn’t all it’s cracked up to be? Have you ever had a vision for your life that you actually attained and then had the crushing realization that it might have been the wrong dream to begin with, or that the realization of the dream came with some harsh new realities that you weren’t expecting?

If you know what that’s like, then you know what Psalm 126 is about.

It’s likely that Psalm 126 was sung after the Israelites returned from exile. You can imagine what it must have been like to come home after 70 years in Babylon. A lifetime in exile.

(*The preacher moves to the outside of the upper part of the imagined circle and begins to walk along the upper half.*)

The psalmist said it was like a dream. There was laughter, joy, testimony. Even “the nations,” the people who worshipped other Gods and often threatened Israel admitted that “The Lord has done great things for them” (Psalm 126: 2) Even they saw the hand of God in the homecoming.

(*The preacher stops before continuing to trace the lower half of the circle.*)

Between the last word of the verse 3, “rejoiced,” and first word of verse 4, “Restore,” it seems that there is a pause. You get the sense that a lot of water has passed under the bridge of the dream.

There is a new reality.

(*Slowly, the preacher begins to trace the bottom half of the circle.*)

You can read about what it was like post-exile in Haggai, Zechariah, Isaiah 3, and Ezra-Nehemiah. The economic hardship and disunity is palpable. There is a realization that there is rebuilding to be done. Planting. Organizing. Hard work ahead.

So the psalmist gets to work…praying.

What comes to his heart are the watercourses of the Negeb. Seasonal drought always dried up the streams, but when the rains coursed, they would team with water.

Our Spirit is that dry, O God. Do that to us.

Literally, he prays, “sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy” (v. 5). You can almost see the psalmist on his knees now.

“Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy” (v. 6).

Let them shout with joy “carrying their sheaves” (v. 6). Not a few grains. Sheaves.

Who of us hasn’t yearned that deeply for restoration? For the mercy of God? Who of us hasn’t cried out to God in hope like the psalmist in the Hebrew scripture reading today or Bartimaeus in the New Testament. Bartimaeus, who gets wind of Jesus passing by him on the road, shouts “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10: 47) so loudly, so embarrassingly, that the people around him try to get him to hush up. And the more they try to get him to quiet down, the louder he yells “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 48).

And there is indeed mercy. Healing mercy. Peace. New dreams. The possibility that the hope of restoration will lead full circle, back to rejoicing.

(*The preacher moves to the upper half of the circle again.*)

Back to laughter, joy, testimony. Back to “The Lord has done great things!”

Here is the good news: We are not stuck here. (The preacher moves back to the lower half of the circle.) We are not immobilized in the dry Negebs of our lives. We are not mired in the old dreams that didn’t turn out the way we expected. We are not confined to the sidelines, yelling in despair.

Our faith assures us that water can come of rock, that new dreams are possible, that grace is ours.

(*The preacher moves back to the upper half of the circle.*)

Ours is a story of good news. And the good news is ours to share. In fact, we can’t not share it.

Once we have come full circle and know that God turns us back to new dreams, it is impossible to pass by anyone else lingering down there where the land is dry and the eyes are wet with tears and where people are calling for mercy, and not, through our care, through our presence, through our actions and our advocacy, offer hope. That’s what you do here at (Name) church and what we do together as a United Church. Offering hope is the mission that you are a part of as God’s church.

You and I are a part of the circle of God’s grace. Both as giver and receiver.

In his poem “Widening Circles,” Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke (1875‒1926) writes of God at the centre of the circle of life:

I live my life in widening circles  
that reach out across the world.  
I may not complete this last one  
but I give myself to it.  
I circle around God, around the primordial tower.  
I’ve been circling for thousands of years  
and I still don’t know: am I a falcon,  
a storm, or a great song?[[3]](#footnote-3)

We may be a falcon, a storm or a great song. It’s true…we fly, we rage, we sing. And at any given point, we might be uncertain of who we are on the circle.

And yet, in all the uncertainty, wherever we go, there is God at the centre of it all, at the heart of our mission, the hub of beauty, wholeness, compassion, and justice. Turning us to new dreams. Inviting us into the centre to turn the wheel for others.

May we give ourselves over. Amen.

(*The music director may choose a selection to sing “in the round.”*)

## Children’s Program

### Scripture

Mark 10:46‒52 – Jesus heals Bartimaeus

### Theme: We can ask others for help

*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 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 just 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 that scripture and prayer are offered.*

### Scripture Story

Share today’s gospel lesson using the *Spark Story Bible*, page 338 (Sparkhouse Publishing, ISBN 9780806670492)

### Children’s Sermon: I need a little help

#### Moral

Sometimes we all need help

#### Supplies

Something small to pick up off the ground, e.g., a coin, plus chocolate coins for all children

#### Lesson

(*With thanks to* [*sermons4kids.com/on\_your\_own.html*](http://www.sermons4kids.com/on_your_own.html) *for inspiration.*)

Place the coin on the ground and tell the children that if they would like to have the coin, all they need to do is pick it up. Before they all dive on the coin, tell them there is just one small catch. They have to pick up the coin using only one finger. Let several children try to pick it up with one finger. Once there have been a few unsuccessful attempts, point out to the children that in order to pick something up, our finger really needs the help of our thumb. And there is one other way that you could get the coin—you could ask someone to help you. If you ask me, then I could pick it up and give it to you. And because I love to share what I have with you, I have a chocolate coin to give each one of you today. (*While you can skip this step, it avoids the upset over one child getting the coin.*)

Sometimes, do you need to ask for help? I certainly do. It can be really hard for grownups to accept help from people, and often grownups are afraid to ask for help. They might feel embarrassed or weak or that they aren’t very good at things if they have to ask for help. Do you ever feel that way? Are there times you don’t ask for help even when you need it?

In our Bible story today, we meet a man who needed Jesus’ help. Bartimaeus was blind and when Jesus came to visit his town, he called out from the crowd for Jesus’ help. Other people told him to be quiet and to not bother Jesus, but Bartimaeus was brave and kept on asking. Jesus heard him and stopped because he was happy to help Bartimaeus. Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he needed, and when he said he wanted to be able to see, Jesus healed him.

This story tells us that God really cares about us, especially when we need help. God makes sure that there are always people in our lives who are there to help us. Sometimes, we just have to be brave like Bartimaeus and ask people for the help that we need.

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

Dear God,

Thank you for sending helpers in our lives. Give us courage to be brave enough to ask for help when we need it. Encourage us to offer help to other people, just as Jesus did. Amen.

*Following the children’s sermon, the children are invited to 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 suggested activities. Feel free to supplement the suggested activities with activities suitable to your context. Offering stations with puzzles, playdough, Lego, books, colouring opportunities, stickers etc., allows children to be engaged in a variety of ways.*

### Children’s Book

*Back to Front and Upside Down* by Claire Alexander (written for ages 4‒7)

In Claire Alexander’s relatable story, we join in as Stan’s class is making birthday cards for Mr. Slipper the school principal. While everyone else is busy writing, Stan becomes frustrated because his letters come out back to front and upside down. He is afraid to ask the teacher for help until he bravely shares his feelings with his friend Jack. When Stan finally decides to ask for help, he realizes that everyone needs help once in a while. This is a lovely book that helps children understand that we all feel frustrated and scared at times, and when we ask for help, then things can get better. Echoing Bartimaeus asking Jesus for help, this story reinforces that being part of a community means we always have a place to turn to when we need support.

#### Reflection questions

* What did Jack need help with?
* How did he feel when he didn’t think he could do the task like the rest of the class?
* How did Jack feel when he finally asked for help?
* Are there things that you need help with?
* Is it hard or easy for you to ask for help?
* What can you do when you’re feeling scared or alone?
* Can you name some people from whom you can ask for help?
* What are ways that you can offer help to other people?
* In our Bible story, what help did Bartimaeus need? What did Jesus do for him?

### Activity: Blindfolded Obstacle Course

*In this activity, children will learn that it is all right to ask for help and to rely on others to get the job done.*

You will need:

* Chairs, hoops, tables, balls, bean bags, dress-up clothes, hats
* Blindfolds—either sleep masks or bandanas/cloths to tie How to play:

Set up an obstacle course for the children to go through. Have things they need to crawl over and under, walk around or through. Include tasks they have to accomplish, e.g., put on an outfit from a basket of clothes, throw a bean bag into a hoop, pin the tail on the donkey. The obstacle course should be easy enough that all children can participate, but offer challenges if they were to do so blindfolded. Of course, ensure the course is safe for all participants.

Invite the children to do the obstacle course while they can see (not blindfolded). Then ask them if they could complete the course while blindfolded. Will it be easier or harder? Have the children find a partner to help them complete the obstacle course—one partner is blindfolded and has to complete the course. The other partner is “sighted” (not blindfolded) and gives directions to the partner pursuing the course. Pair older children with younger children. After everyone has had a turn, talk about how it felt to be “helped.” Was it hard to need help? Did receiving help make things easier? What made for a good “helper”? What did it feel like to be the helper?

Take it one step further:

Have children try to accomplish other tasks in blindfolded pairs. Participants could try and put together an easy children’s puzzles (with large pieces) or create a tower with stacking blocks/Duplo. You could have children try and eat a snack (something a little tricky like yogurt with a spoon) while blindfolded.

Following the activities, discuss with the children what it was like not to be able to see. Was it scary? Difficult? Wonder with them what it is like to live without one or more of our senses. What might it be like to live with special needs? Are there ways we can make our church more accessible for people who have special needs?

### Craft: I Spy bags

Go to learning4kids.net for step-by-step photos and instructions on [how to make an eye spy sensory bag](https://www.learning4kids.net/2015/11/25/homemade-eye-spy-sensory-bag-keeping-kids-occupied-in-the-car/).

You will need:

* medium-size Ziploc bags (thicker plastic than the regular sandwich bags), 2 per child
* coloured duct tape
* rice or small plastic pellets (at least 1 cup per child)
* small objects (e.g., beads, coins, paper clips, toys, key chains, dice, pompoms—all should be smaller than a loonie), 10 objects per child
* index cards
* string/ribbon
* markers

Have each child choose approximately 10 small toys/items. Write down those items on the cue card so the child knows what will be in their bag.

Place at least 1 cup of rice (plastic pellets) and the toys into one Ziploc bag. Add enough rice to ensure the toys are covered, but the whole bag can still be easily manipulated by little hands.

Close the bag securely, ensuring all air has been pressed out of the bag. Seal the edge with duct tape to avoid the bag opening. Fold the sealed edge over and tape again.

Place the sealed bag, zipper side down, into the second Ziploc bag and seal, removing all air inside. Seal the zipper with tape again.

Place decorative duct tape around the outside edges of the bag to create a “window” to see into the bag. You can leave a window on each side, or cover one whole side with tape and leave one side with a window. The window should be fairly large.

Attach the card to the bag using ribbon or string.

Children can now search for the objects hidden in the rice, time how long it takes to find them all, find them in alphabetical order, and find them smallest to biggest, etc.

Children can bring the bags home or leave them at church to have as a quiet activity to use in the pews during worship.

### Youth Activity: Seeing the Big Picture

Oftentimes, our youth look at the world with a limited perspective, believing the way they “see” things is the only or the correct way of understanding an event or experience. From the book of Isaiah onward, we read that one of the great mandates of the Messiah is to bring sight to the blind, to open people’s eyes to a new life of justice and compassion.

Today’s lesson can help youth consider different perspectives, to recognize that working together can provide a clearer understanding of any situation, and to accept the need ask for and receive help.

Share the scripture lesson with the youth. You might read the story from several different versions or, after reading the story, invite the youth to dramatize it. Or they might choose and discuss a character from the story with whom they identify.

#### Discussion questions following scripture

* What was it that Bartimaeus needed from Jesus?
* Why were people telling Bartimaeus to be quiet?
* What did Jesus mean when he told Bartimaeus “Your faith has healed you”?
* What message does this story offer to people who are in need of help?
* Who do you turn to when you need help?
* How does it feel to ask for help?

### Activity: The Blind Men and the Elephant

The Blind Men and the Elephant is a parable from India that tells the story of six blind travellers that come across different parts of an elephant in their life journeys. Based on what they experience, they try to learn what an elephant is, with each traveller describing what they have encountered. With limited information, the group disagree on their findings. It is only when they share their information that the true nature of an elephant can finally be realized. This story has been adapted by many religions and published in various forms for children and adults alike. Share a version of this story with the youth. Search online for a version that best suits your students, e.g.:

* AmericanLiterature.com: [The Blind Men and the Elephant by James Baldwin](https://americanliterature.com/author/james-baldwin/short-story/the-blind-men-and-the-elephant)
* Indian Stories for Children: [The Six Blind Men and the Elephant](http://anustoriesforchildren.blogspot.com/2010/06/six-blind-men-and-elephant.html)
* YouTube: [The Blind Men and the Elephant](https://youtu.be/Vn9BUfUCL4I) video

#### Reflection questions

* How could the travellers have come up with a better picture of the elephant?
* How is this story of describing an elephant like our efforts to describe God?
* How do we come up with a “full picture” of something?
* How did Jesus help other people to “see” the full picture? What were people missing? What do we miss?

Gather a collection of objects for the youth as well as a blindfold for each youth. Be sure the objects are unusual so that it will be challenging for the youth to figure out what they are feeling (e.g., kitchen gadgets, tools, figurines). In small groups, invite the youth to put on their blindfolds and then examine each object. Leaving the blindfolds on, have each youth describe what it is they felt. Have the small group come up with a consensus about the object before they remove their blindfolds. Ask the youth what might have made the experience easier for them? What help did they need?

Discuss with the youth what happens when we only see something with a limited perspective. What kinds of things get in our way of seeing the big picture (laziness, lack of care, being selfish, inexperience, unwillingness to think outside the box)? How is it that we as Christians are called to look at the world? How can the church help people to see “the big picture”? Invite the youth to bring the blindfolds home with them and leave them in a place where they will see them as a reminder of our need as Christians to look at the big picture, to see things from different perspectives, and to work with others to achieve God’s vision for our world.

# Sunday 5, All Saints’ Sunday: Celebrate and Offer Gratitude

## Worship Service

*It’s time to celebrate and say thank you! Share the results of this campaign with the congregation and give thanks. Find a way to share the results that involves multiples senses: project the results on a screen and have someone from the stewardship group share them aloud. Decommission the stewardship group if appropriate and incorporate a hug or handshake into that moment. Throw a small party after worship so that you can all raise a glass (sparkling juice?), break bread, and enjoy the fruits of this journey that started five weeks ago.*

### We Gather

### Prelude Greeting/Welcome

(*including Acknowledging the Traditional Territory*)

Welcome in the name of the Christ.  
Welcome to this place of worship, situated on the Traditional lands of the \_\_\_\_ people(s).  
For five weeks, we have journeyed together,  
contemplating God’s promise of abundance for all,  
remembering with gratitude our many blessings,  
and recommitting ourselves to sharing all that we have and all that we are  
with the world that God so loves.  
This morning, we gather to celebrate, give thanks, and praise.  
Let us prepare to worship God.

### Lighting of Christ Candle

(*if this is the congregation’s tradition*)

We light this candle once more this morning, to shine a light of hope for all to see. We trust that the light of Christ is present with us in this place and shines brightly in our lives and in our community of faith.

### Call/Invitation to Worship

One: Come and celebrate God’s presence!  
**All: We come to celebrate our journey together.**One: Come and celebrate this community of saints!  
**All: We celebrate with all communities of saints down through the ages,**One: from generation to generation.  
**All: You have blessed your church, O God.**One: We give you thanks and praise your holy name.  
**All: Come, let us worship God!**

### Opening Prayer

(*use 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 our spirits for the road ahead.  
We gather to learn the wisdom of your way and feel the warmth of your love.  
Bless our gathering as we join our hearts and minds together in worship.   
Amen.**

### Hymn

“Now Thank We All Our God/Louons le Créateur” (*Voices United* 236) or “God of the Bible” (*More Voices* 28)

### Children’s Time

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#Children’s_Program_Sunday_2_–_October_11)*.*)

### Hymn

“Bless the Lord” (MV 46) or “Shout for God” (VU 246)

### We Receive the Word

### Prayer for Illumination

**Holy One, may we listen attentively to your Word so that we might be inspired once more by the stories of our ancestors of faith. Let the words touch our hearts and move us to compassion and celebration. Amen.**

### Scripture

2 Chronicles 7:1–3

**Psalm 146** (VU p. 867) responsively

Colossians 3:12–17

Matthew 22:34–40

### Choir Anthem or Musical Reflection

### Sermon

Wisdom in the Holy Happening (*See* [*below*](#_Sermon:_Wisdom_in_1)*.*)

#### Hymn

“I’ll Praise My Maker While I’ve Breath” (VU p. 867) or “It’s a Song of Praise to the Maker” (MV 30)

### We Respond

### Announcements

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

### Minute for Mission

(*Search* [*“Stories of Our Mission”*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/generosity-through-mission-and-service/stories-our-mission) *at united-church.ca.*)

### Invitation to the Offering

In recognition of the journey of these past five weeks, and in support of the mission and ministry of our community of faith and the wider church, let us take up our offering now with glad and joyful hearts.

#### Offertory Hymn

“We Are Pilgrims” (VU 595) or “In Loving Partnership We Come” (VU 603) or “We Give Our Thanks (Reamo leboga)” (MV 187)

### Prayer of Dedication

(*all together*)

**Gracious God, we offer these gifts so that the mission of ministry of your church might be sustained and strengthened, bringing hope and joy into the lives of our neighbours around the world and here at home. Amen.**

### Prayers of the People

(*Invite the members of your stewardship team, or perhaps your council, to compose the prayers of the people this week. Lift up this stewardship campaign and give thanks for generosity extended for the work of the saints to build up the kingdom.*)

### Possible Bidding and Response

**Bidding:** With gratitude and with all the saints, we pray…  
**Congregational response:** Gracious God, hear our prayer.

### The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

### We Are Sent Out

### Commissioning

Let us march into the coming week with renewed enthusiasm for God’s mission in the world. Go out and share the wisdom of the generations of saints that have gone before us and the generosity of saints in this community of faith with the world God so dearly loves.

### Hymn

“When the Saints Go Marching In” (*Have fun with this. Jazz it up. Invite folks to move!*) or “We Are Marching” (VU 646)

### Benediction

(*based on A New Creed*)

One: We are not alone; we live in God’s world.  
Therefore...  
**All: May we trust deeply in our Creating God,  
and live with respect in Creation.  
May we love ourselves and others,  
share generously all that we have,  
seek justice,  
resist evil,  
and boldly proclaim with all the saints  
that Jesus, crucified and risen,  
is our light, our judge, and our hope. Amen.**

### Postlude

## Sermon: Wisdom in the Holy Happening

*Based on Psalm 146*

Psalm 146 sounds like a résumé. If it came across your desk, would you hire God? Let’s see:

Keeps faith (check!)  
Executes justice (right on!)  
Gives food to the hungry (just what we need!)  
Sets the prisoners free (awesome!)  
Opens the eyes of the blind (wow!)  
Lifts up those who are bowed down (nice!)  
Loves the righteous (good!)  
Watches over strangers (fantastic!)  
Upholds the orphan and widow (excellent!)  
Brings to ruin the way of the wicked (impressive!)

Sounds like someone I’d want to bring on board. What about you? Show of hands! Do we want to bring God along? Yes! Hallelujah!

Psalm 146 doesn’t kick off the Hallelujah Psalms (the last five psalms in the Bible) for nothing. It is the beginning of the end; a resounding crescendo of what God can do. Each of the five psalms begins and ends with an exuberant “Praise ye the Lord,” or, in the Hebrew, “Hallelujah!”

While “Hallelujah” shows up 22 times in the Hebrew scriptures, it appears just four times in the Greek, all of them when the great congregation of saints convenes in heaven. Revelation 19:5 tells us that the saints will show up in the company of angels to rejoice and give praise. It’s an image of a divine party. A holy happening. We wouldn’t want to miss it.

(*The choir or soloist breaks into the refrain*:)

Oh, when the saints go marchin’ in,  
Oh, when the saints go marchin’ in,  
Lord, I want to be in that number  
When the saints go marchin’ in.

In fact, from Psalm 146 through to Psalm 150, the party gets bigger and bigger. Psalm 146 is very individual. The psalmist calls himself to praise God. “Oh *my* soul” (Psalm 146: 1) he says. In Psalm 147, all the people of Jerusalem are called to praise. Fast forward to the very last verse of the entire book of the Psalms and everything shows up: “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150:6).

I’ve been to some pretty blockbuster parties in my time and I bet you have, too. But can you imagine what it would be like if “everything that breathes” was invited to the party? You can imagine the invites: Are you breathing? Frosting the glass? Well, come on over.

This vision isn’t just of a street party, but an *every* street party. A party of the whole cosmos. Wow! Wouldn’t that be something? A celebration to end all celebrations!

(*The choir or soloist breaks into the refrain*:)

And when the sun begins to shine,  
And when the sun begins to shine,  
Oh, how I want to be in that number  
When the sun begins to shine.

Isn’t it great that our stewardship campaign ends on All Saints’ Sunday against the backdrop of a great party? A cosmic celebration of a God with a résumé against which there is no comparison.

Thank you for your investment of time, talent, and money. Thank you for responding to the invitation to be among the number of saints, past and present, who want to continue God’s work outlined in Psalm 146: keeping faith, executing justice, feeding the hungry, freeing, opening, lifting, loving, watching, upholding. The world is blessed through the work of the church, through you.

Let’s keep the party going. Let’s celebrate and give praise to God “all my life long” (Psalm 146:2), as the psalm says. Consider the psalm a standing invitation to join the holy, cosmic party every day of your life. Let’s join the holy number!

(*Everyone sings:*)

Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call,  
Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call,  
Oh Lord, I want to be in that number,  
When the saints go marching in.

Oh, when the saints go marching in,  
Oh, when the saints go marching in,  
Oh Lord I want to be in that number,  
When the saints go marching in.

Oh, when the saints go marchin’ in,  
Oh, when the saints go marchin’ in,  
Lord, I want to be in that number,  
When the saints go marchin’ in.

## Children’s Program

### Scripture

Matthew 22:34‒40 The Greatest Commandment

### Theme: We can live lives of love and thanks

*Worshipping as an entire community of faith provides meaningful experiences for children in worship. You might invite children to participate in the opening liturgical moments of the service, including sharing a Call to Worship 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 just 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 that scripture and prayer are offered.*

### Scripture Story

Share today’s gospel lesson using the *Spark Story Bible*, page 308 (Sparkhouse Publishing, ISBN 9780806670492)

### Children’s Sermon: Building a Church of Gratitude

#### Moral

Gratitude is the foundation of our life as a faith community.

#### Supplies

Building blocks/Lego/Duplo―enough to construct a “building”

#### Lesson

Talk with the children about how all buildings need foundations—the solid pieces that offer support for the whole structure. Our church has a foundation; it is made of bricks/concrete and it holds up our whole building. Along with the physical foundations of our church, there are important people and activities that are key to making our church what it is. Let’s think of some of those things and let’s offer thanks for them. Let’s build a church of gratitude.

Invite the children to take a brick/block from the pile you have brought and to say something they are grateful for in the church. They can then begin building the church with each of their blocks of gratitude. You might want to have started the building ahead of time so that the children know where to add their bricks. Keep on finding things to be grateful for and adding bricks. Invite the adults to name things/events/people for which they are grateful to continue the building!

Remind the children that Jesus taught us that the most important thing we can do is to love God and to love our neighbours. When we live lives of love and thanks, we are doing just what Jesus taught us to do. Wonder with the children how they might live out their thanks so that together we might continue building a church of gratitude.

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

Dear God, thank you for our church. Thank you for all the ways that we feel your love in this place. Help me remember to be grateful. Help me to find ways to show your love to other people. Amen.

*Following the Children’s Sermon, the children are invited to 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 suggested activities or games. Feel free to supplement the suggested activities with other activities suitable for your context. Offering activity stations with puzzles, playdough, Lego, books, colouring opportunities, stickers etc., allows children to be engaged in a variety of ways each week.*

### Children’s Book

*Love the World* by Todd Parr (written for ages 2‒6)

Using his signature style of simple rhymes, bold colours, diverse representation in the illustrations, and heart-felt messages, Todd Parr celebrates love, respect, peace, and unity in Love the World. While best suited for preschool children, this book touches on themes such as self-esteem, environmentalism, and respect for others that can be explored by various ages. The church is the place where children can learn by example what it means to love our neighbours, and how it is that we carry that love into the world. This story can help children think about how they can show love for themselves, for others, and for the wider world.

#### Reflection questions

* What are some things you love?
* What is easy to love?
* What is hard to love?
* What did Jesus say about loving?
* How does our church show love?
* How can you show love to others? To our world?

### Activity/Games: Loving Your Neighbour

In a large space, have the children play a game of **Neighbour Tag**. Children are paired. Two children who are “it” are in the centre of the space, while the rest of the children are lined up on one side of the gym/hall/field and must run to the other side without getting tagged by those who are “it.” If any child gets tagged, they must remain frozen until their neighbour makes their way back to unfreeze them. Pairs take turns to be “it.” Point out to the children that they cannot get to safety without being aware of everyone, without helping one another, reminding them that they need to care about their neighbours always.

Play a game of **Love Charades**. On index cards, write out or draw pictures of ways that children might show God’s love for others (e.g., pray for a friend, help with the dishes, share your toys, hug someone, hold the door open, shovel your neighbour’s driveway,

write a love note). Invite the children individually or in pairs to act out one of the ways we can show love for our neighbour while the rest of the children try to guess.

Older children might play the **I Love My Neighbour** game detailed in the Youth section of today’s lesson (see below).

Share the Veggie Tales video [*Are You My Neighbor?*](https://youtu.be/gLfKYdLyhAc) (from Big Ideas video and available on DVD), which offers two cartoons (each 15 minutes) on the subject of loving your neighbour. Children and youth alike enjoy the silly songs and meaningful Christian messages of [*Veggie Tales* videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChddokv0fxIN3BS-KZpxFfA)!

### Craft: Love Your Neighbour Cards

*As the congregation’s stewardship program winds up, now is an excellent opportunity for the children to share their love and gratitude with the wider congregation by making caring note cards.*

You will need:

* construction paper/cardstock
* markers/pens/crayons/paint
* decorations (stickers, ribbons, photos, magazine pictures, etc.)
* scissors
* glue

Have the children create cards of love and gratitude, encouraging them to be as creative as they like with the design. One idea is to have children trace and cut out hand prints from construction paper. Glue them to the inside pages of the card with fingers pointing down and thumbs touching so that the thumb and first fingers form a heart shape. On the front of the card, write a message of love (e.g., we love you, we love our neighbours, you are loved). Older children can write messages of gratitude and care themselves, or you can have pre-printed messages. Key leaders in the congregation can be identified as recipients of the cards, or children can choose whom they would like to give a caring card to, or cards can be passed out randomly during fellowship hour or mailed to congregation members. Who wouldn’t love to receive a homemade card saying “Thanks for being part of our church family―we love you”?

### Youth Activity: Loving My Neighbour

*In today’s lesson, there is the opportunity for youth to think about what it means to “love your neighbour as yourself”―an especially valuable lesson at a time in life when many youth feel unlovable and can find it hard to share love with those who are different from themselves. As youth leaders, fostering discussion about differences, encouraging positive self-image, and finding healthy and life-giving ways to share love is a gift and a challenge.*

Share the scripture lesson with the youth. You might read several different versions of the story, listening for words or images that are repeated or stand out.

#### Discussion questions following scripture

* What did Jesus mean when he said “Love your neighbour as yourself”?
* How do we love ourselves?
* Who is your neighbour?
* When do you find it easy to follow this commandment of Jesus? When is it difficult?

### Activity/Game: I Love My Neighbour

#### Set up

Place chairs in a circle. Make sure there is one less chair than the number of players.

#### How to play

Choose someone to start the game and ask them to stand in the centre of the circle. Everyone else is sitting in a chair.

The person standing in the centre of the circle begins the game by saying “I love my neighbor, especially my neighbor who.…” They complete the sentence with a piece of information that is true about themselves. For example, “I love my neighbour, especially my neighbour who has a dog/loves tofu/is an only child/has brown hair, etc.”

Then everyone who this applies to (including the person in the centre of the circle) must move from their chair to find an empty chair. People cannot move to a chair that is immediately next to them.

One person will be left without a chair, and they take their place in the centre of the circle to begin the next round of the game.

This game can get quite physical as people jostle for chairs, so do be aware of safety.

### Activity: What Does Loving My Neighbour Look Like?

Bring in newspapers or go online to have youth search current events for stories of people loving their neighbours. Read the stories in small groups and share them with the larger group.

#### Reflection questions

* Can you think of a story about when you have seen someone loving their neighbour in your school? In your community?
* What are some ways that people show love for their neighbour?
* What are some ways the church shows love for our neighbours?
* How do we show love for our neighbours when they are hard to love?

Share a Minute for Mission or other story about how Mission & Service lives out Jesus’ commandment to love our neighbours.

Encourage the youth to think of one way they will show love for their neighbours in the coming week.

1. Adapted from *Come, Let Us Worship God* by David M. Currie © 1977 The Westminster Press. All rights reserved. See: <thethoughtfulchristian.com/Products/0664247571/come-let-us-worship-god.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from *A New Zealand Prayer Book* | He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa, 1989, and used with permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The poem appears in *The Book of Hours* by Rainer Rilke. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)