# In God’s Own Image A worship service celebrating the Churches’ Commitments to Children

## Gathering

*For this service, consider having children lead the opening section of worship (adapt to suit their age). Have children and their families be the morning greeters, hand out bulletins, and so on, or set up and serve at coffee hour. One of the priorities of the World Council of Churches* [*Churches’ Commitments to Children*](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness/rights-of-children/churches-commitments-to-children) *is to encourage meaningful participation of children in church life.*

### Singing

VU 445 “A Little Child the Saviour Came” (baptism hymn)

VU 644 “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry”

MV 183 “I’m Gonna Shout, Shout”

### Call to Worship

Beloved of God, we are called here today.

**We are called at every age, from every corner, to gather.**

Children of God, let us playfully worship together,

**worshipping God who made each of us and loves all of us.**

God be with you. **And also with you.**

### Hymn

MV 161 “I Have Called You by Your Name”

VU 357 “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus”

### Prayer

**God of All the Ages,**

**we thank you for this day,**

**for caring for us beautifully in this time.**

**We praise your name for the gift of children**

**in our lives and in our community.**

**Forgive us for times when we discount their voices.**

**Help us share your story with one another**

**that we may remember your love written on our hearts.**

**Remind us to follow children,**

**as they lead us to living the kin-dom way.**

**We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

### Words of Assurance

In the story of Genesis, when God created humankind—they were created in God’s image! And indeed, God blessed them so they might grow and flourish along with creation.

As children of God, we are blessed again and again with the love of God,

and we are welcomed into relationship with Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### Passing the Peace of Christ

### Children’s Time

Talk with the children about how they feel when they are serving God’s people. It demonstrates to the congregation that they have much to offer the community, that they aren’t there to “look cute,” but they are there to love and serve God with the rest of the Body of Christ.

## Word

**1st Lesson**  Deuteronomy 11:18–21

**2nd Lesson** Matthew 18:1–5, 19:13–15

### Sermon Notes

On the World Council of Churches’ Pilgrimage to Justice and Peace, there has been an emphasis placed on the role and call of children in the church and to the church. The WCC set out three main priorities for its member churches (including us, The United Church of Canada):

1. Promote child protection through church communities
2. Promote meaningful participation by children and adolescents
3. Raise church voices for intergenerational climate justice, supporting initiatives for and with children and adolescents

From the 10th Assembly of the WCC, the document “Putting Children at the Centre” states: “We affirm that [children’s] dignity comes from their creation in God’s own image. They are precious human beings with rights that need to be guaranteed and protected by our families, our societies, and our churches. When Jesus called a child and put that child in the centre (Matthew 18:1–5), he not only demonstrated extraordinary respect for children, but he upheld their inherent human dignity and challenged his disciples to learn from them.”

Jesus touched the children, blessing them with the love and grace of God. With blessing comes the sense that one is important and valued for who they are in that moment, not for who they might become. It is a reminder of the blessing you received at baptism, that you are a beloved child of God, and might continue to discover the gift of that identity.

As we look at the texts and consider the history and present-day experience of children in our congregation, keep returning to these commitments and examine how you are living them out today. Is there a global partner you are in relationship with? Find out the struggles and joys facing their children today. (For example, search [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca) for “No Way to Treat a Child” [youth in Israeli detention] and “Bread Not Stones” [child poverty].)

Some questions to ponder:

* Where in the world do children need our voices to recognize their inherent human dignity? How can we as a church, as Canadians advocate for this?
* What is the child poverty rate in your community? How are you partnering with others to end child poverty in Canada?
* What are ways our church fosters intergenerational relationships? Celebrate those! Is there a common mission/project you could work on together?
* How are you exploring God’s love together—so it is written in your hearts and souls?

*Quotes from Children* (from the WCC publication, [“Churches’ Commitments to Children”](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness/rights-of-children/churches-commitments-to-children/)):

“If the commitments become a reality then children will know someone always cares for them.”—Child in United Kingdom

“In their sermons pastors should use a language that we can understand and not make us bored.”—Child in Nigeria

“What would Jesus think about how we treat the earth?”—Child in South Africa

Find more resources on the World Council of Churches website ([Resources and tools available for the implementation of Churches’ Commitments to Children](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness/rights-of-children/resources-available-to-support-member-churches-in-the-implementation-of-each-principle)).

### Hymn

MV 149 “Peace for the Children”

VU 555 “Our Parent, by Whose Name”

### Offering

Let us commit our hearts and our treasures to serving God

with the whole Body of Christ throughout the world.

### Offertory Response

MV 191 “What Can I Do?”

VU 542 “We Give You But Your Own”

### Prayers of the People

Gracious God,

We thank you for the gifts of this day,

for the time to gather with all ages, as part of the Body of Christ in the world.

Most of all, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus,

as he came to be guest and host at our tables.

We pray for the faithful all over the world,

that all who love you may be united in your service.

We pray for the church,

for our witness and action together in and around Canada and with our global partners.

May we support partners working with children, like the Wesley Centre in Hamilton

*(insert local examples of outreach ministries that work with children)*

and the Wi’am Centre in Palestine and Israel...

May we continue to love and serve as Jesus taught,

calling those on the margins to gather together for God’s blessing.

O God, know our hearts. And love us, we pray.

We pray for the peoples and leaders of the nations,

that they may be reconciled one to another

in pursuit of your justice and peace.

We pray that our leaders—

national, provincial, and local—

might serve with humility and grace,

remembering the needs around them

of all peoples and all ages.

We pray for all who suffer from prejudice, greed, or violence,

that the heart of your humanity

may warm with your tenderness.

We pray especially for all prisoners of politics or religion,

and for all refugees.

We pray for children of the world who face emotional, sexual, or physical violence.

Help us challenge behaviours and attitudes that cause harm,

and help us become advocates for a world that values children.

We pray for the land, the sea, and the sky,

that we may live with respect in creation

and use your gifts with reverence.

We pray that the generations beyond us

will love and respect your blessings of creation.

O God, know our hearts. And love us, we pray.

We pray for all who suffer the pain of sickness,

loneliness, fear, or loss,

that those whose names are in our hearts,

in the hearts of others, or known to you alone

may receive strength and courage.

And in the silence of our hearts, we name those dear to us

and those we meet yet do not know….

O God, know our hearts. And love us. we pray.

Now, let us use the words Jesus taught us, praying…

### Lord’s Prayer

## Sending Forth

### Hymn

MV 221 I Am Walking a Path of Peace

VU 340 Jesus, Friend of Little Children

### Commissioning

Let us go into the world daring to let children lead,

partnering with friends and neighbours,

as we seek God’s justice and peace.

### Blessing

May God, who loves us from our borning cry, go with us.

May Jesus, who welcomes us into relationship, stay with us.

And may the Spirit’s persistent call for peace be with us.

This day. This week. And always. Amen.

VU 431 “Sing Amen”

### Postlude

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