Emancipation Day Service

**August 1, 2022**

**Order of Worship**

**Theme: Emancipated but Still Working Towards Freedom**

Visit the United Church YouTube channel for a [recording of this service](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI5VLWwA1Js), as well as a [discussion panel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbICgC1VPtA). This liturgy is also [available in French](https://egliseunie.ca/prieres-et-liturgies/liturgies-et-prieres-liturgiques/liturgies/).

## Prelude:

## Greetings and Land Acknowledgement:

 Rev. Michael Blair, General Secretary of the United Church of Canada

## Call to Worship:

 God of all People, we come to worship you.

 **We come before you to give you thanks and praise.**

 God of all people, we come to you as people whom you love.

 **We worship you today and always with our whole selves.**

 Come everyone. Let us worship God.

## Opening Hymn:

 **Sweet, Sweet Spirit**

## Opening Prayer:

God of all people,

 we come acknowledging you in all your majesty and glory.

We thank you that as Black people we share with all humanity your divine grace and favour. Help us in our worship to lift to you all of creation in its beauty and splendour.

Help us in our worship to remember the struggles and pain of our ancestors.

Help us to journey with pride strengthened by those whose struggles and sacrifice

 have paved the way of liberty for us.

Help us in our reflections to recommit to seeking justice and liberty for ourselves

 and all who are devalued, exploited, and oppressed.

To you be all honour and glory today and always.

Amen.

## Opening Hymn:

 **VU 619/ NVU 259 Healer of our Every Ill/ Dieu de notre guérison**

## Scripture:

 **Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15**

## Scripture:

 **Romans 12:1-18**

## Reflection: *The Emancipated Mind: Remember, Reflect, Refocus*

The transatlantic slave trade involved the forced removal of African people from theirhomeland as forced labour for their colonies. The slave trade caused the deaths of millions of African people on their way the ships, on the journey across the Atlantic. Approximately 12.5 million African captives were transported to Latin America and the Caribbean, while 6% were brought to North America. The law forced them to work for free, change their names, abandon their faiths, reject their cultures, stop speaking their native tongues and encounter the most brutal forms of torture and abuse. If this story sounds like the story of the Indigenous people, it is because it is the colonial pattern of behaviour.

Quebec Historian, Marcel Trudel estimated that there were approximately 4,200 enslaved people in Canada at a place known as New France, and later in Upper and Lower Canada, between 1671 and 1831. At first around 2/3 of the enslaved people were Indigenous and 1/3 were of African descent. When the British settlers came to Upper Canada, they brought an additional 3000 Black Loyalists, enslaved men, women, and children of African descent. In 1796, nearly 600 people, known as the Maroons, were deported from Jamaica to Nova Scotia, following their rebellion against the colonial government. Many worked on the third fortification at the Citadel in Halifax and on Government House. Others were formed into a local militia company to help protect Nova Scotia from a feared French invasion. After petitioning the colonial authorities to leave the territory, 551 Maroons sailed from Halifax to Freetown, Sierra Leone, 9 remained. Over 30,000 enslaved African Americans came to Canada via the Underground Railroad until the end of the American Civil War in 1865. In resistance, many slaves, escaped to what was known as the Northwest Territory which included Michigan and Ohio, as well as to Vermont and New York, where slavery was banned.

On March 24, 2021, the House of Commons voted unanimously to officially designate August 1, Emancipation Day. It marks the actual day in 1834 that the *Slavery Abolition Act* of 1833 came into effect across the British Empire.

This act laid the path of freedom to over 800,000 enslaved Africans and their descendants in parts of the Caribbean, Africa, South America and Canada. The Act confirmed Canada as a free territory for enslaved African Americans. Thousands of African Americans subsequently arrived on Canadian soil between 1834 and the early 1860s.

We return to this story to remember the struggle, to reflect on the progress, to refocus and plan for the future.

As we return to this story, we are called to REMEMBER:

We are called to remember that it was no small feat for the Moses of that time to confront the Pharaohs and give them no other choice but to let our ancestors go. We remember with gratitude the willingness of the Moses(es) of that time to resist and their determination to keep pushing until the enslavement of people of African descent was no longer economically or socially viable.

We are called to remember that the journey to full freedom was laced with struggle that like the Israelites there was a struggle to survive, to meet even their most basic needs. There was struggle to create community, to build trust among themselves, to engage with the social systems and struggle to begin the process of healing from the physical and psycho-emotional wounds that are both generation and personal.

We are called to remember in the words of Rosamond and Weldon Johnson that “*we have come over a way that with tears have been watered. We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered. We now stand having come out from a gloomy past”.*

We are called to remember that God answers prayer. That God heard the cries of the enslaved and raised up the people that fought to achieve emancipation.

As we return to this story, we are called to REFLECT:

To be emancipated is more than physical freedom.

Emancipation does not happen simply because one is set free from physical, legal, social, or political restriction. Freedom does not happen simply because one is no longer confined. The enslavement process involved both a physical and mental component. Unlike physical slavery, mental slavery is more pernicious.

Carter G. Woodson in the Miseducation of the Negrodescribesmental slavery this way *“when you control a person’s thinking you do not have to worry about their actions. You do not have to tell them not to stand here or go yonder. They will find their ‘proper place’ and will stay in it. You do not need to send them to the back door. They will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, they will cut one for their special benefit. Their education makes it necessary”.*

Make no mistake, none of us a free from the legacies of mental enslavement. One group was conditioned to think they are superior and the other to think they inferior. Or as Woodson puts it, to know their place. We are called to reflect on how conditioned we are still, how emancipated we are. We can make that determination by looking at the legacies of enslavement and racism that present in our thinking and actions today.

1. Are there still those who hold the prejudices and who maintain the systems of white supremacy and in so doing prevent or stifle the progress of people of African descent?
2. Are there still people of African descent who struggle to love the person who looks back at them in the mirror, who feel compelled to contort themselves to fit in, who have sacrificed their identity to be included? People who live with mental health challenges and are live at a disadvantage economically and socially. All because of the implanted idea that the colour of ones skin determines ones worth.

If these two groups of people are still present in our society, then emancipation has not happened it is still happening.

Emancipation did not happen, on August 1, 1934. We are my friends, emancipating. A process initiated by the legal declaration, but after the declaration, it is up to the people of that time to interpret what that means. At the time of the Abolition Act there was only partial liberation. It only freed children under the age of six. Others were to continue serving their former owners for four to six years as apprentices.

Today, 188 years later, our reflection must bring us to the question, how emancipated are we?

To be honest, while progress has been made, recent headlines and current policies would indicate not enough. The slow change I assert is due to complacency, the belief that because physical enslavement has changed in the laws that everything else will follow. Neglecting the conditioning that has occurred embedding the prejudicial, discriminatory, inferiority/superiority world view into the minds and hearts of the people. Though there is legal and physical emancipation, the minds and hearts of many people have not been emancipated, and their actions reflect their mindset.

As we return to this story, we are called to REFOCUS:

To redirect our efforts on the conversion, transformation of the hearts and minds of the people. To help people develop an emancipated mind. What does an emancipated mind look like?

1. An emancipated mind, recognizes God’s mercy and in response, lives a life of sacrifice and commitment to doing the right thing, to honour God.
2. An emancipated mind has a renewed outlook on the way the world should work. That outlook is informed by God’s will of goodness and joy for us.
3. An emancipated mind does not think of themselves as more highly than other and accords this same freedom to others. Giving everyone an equal chance to discover their gifts and express themselves.
4. An emancipated mind, loves sincerely, hates what is evil; clings to what is good, recognizes, respects, and celebrates differences.
5. An emancipated mind is zealous in service, with an uplifting spirit, they are joyful in hope, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer.
6. An emancipated mind practices hospitality, forgives quickly, rejoices with those who rejoice, mourns with those who mourn.
7. An emancipated mind, lives in harmony with others and are humble enough to associate with people of low position.
8. An emancipated mind acts with integrity and if it is possible, as far as it depends on them, live at peace with everyone.

We know that if more people thought this way, it would transform how the world operates. It would change human relationships and social systems.

An emancipated mind is needed for the journey ahead. If we are going to move, to progress, we need an emancipated mind to think in Christ-like terms and pave a path that leads to full freedom for all.

This Emancipation Day, August 1, I invite you to remember the story of people of African descent. We give thanks for the minds that fought enslavement and began the process of reshaping our society into an Emancipating one. We have covered some ground with laws and policies, now we have the task of addressing the mental enslavement.

This Emancipation Day, August 1, I invite you to reflect on the progress that has been made in the ongoing fight against anti-Black racism and discrimination. To identify the areas personally and corporately that more work needs to be done.

This Emancipation Day, August 1, I invite you to refocus on facilitating the emancipation of the heart and minds of the people. As hearts and minds are reoriented, it will transform attitudes and inevitably action. In so doing there will be complete freedom for all. Amen.

**The Rev. Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes, is minister at Sharon-Hope United Church, Sharon, ON**

## Song:

 **VU 376 Spirit of the Living God**

## Prayers of the People:

God of all people,

we come before you with our joy, our pain, our hope, and our gratitude.

We come before you to celebrate the gift of our beauty as Black people,

 a beauty not only reflected in our skin but even more so in our hearts.

Thank you, Creator

for reminding us of your love for all people.

We commit to living in love in the face of aggression, oppression, prejudice, and hate.

We pray for our kindred all over the world for whom emancipation

 is not reflected in their reality but remains a distant dream.

## Sung Response:

 **MV66 Senzeni-na?**

Many still suffer from the physical, social, psychological, and economic impacts

 of a world order rooted in centuries of colonial occupation,

 plunder, and violence against Black people and people of colour.

Do forgive those whose actions and way of life intentionally and unintentionally cause us to emotionally and even physically relive the trauma faced by our ancestors.

## Sung Response:

 **MV66 Senzeni-na?**

Yet we come with hope because you are a God of justice

 and with you all things are possible.

We pray O God that you will grant healing in every place of pain and suffering

 especially where persistent injustice and inequity

 has led to broken spirits and loss of hope.

We pray for peace in a world where there is so much conflict, division, and hate.

Help those who have been victims of persistent and

 systemic inequality injustice and violence to find healing, freedom, and restoration.

We pray for those who continue the fight to make emancipation more than just a vision but a practical reality for millions of our siblings and cousins.

## Sung Response:

 **MV66 Senzeni-na?**

God of mercy,

it is not always easy to forgive those who have caused harm

but we ask that even as we continue to feel the pain of injustice and oppression,

you will give the strength and will to forgive and love as you have taught us to do.

Help us to form partnerships with those who share the goal of forging genuine and lasting relationships of love and peace with all humanity.

We offer all our prayers to you,

the God of love and mercy through Jesus the Christ

who taught us to pray saying ….

## Lord’s Prayer:

## Closing Song:

 **Lift Every Voice and Sing**

## Commissioning/Sending forth:

 Let us go to our work and into our relationships

 stimulated by hope,

 strengthened by faith,

 directed by love,

 to play our part in the liberation of all people,

 in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

 Amen.

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## Benediction:

 May God bless you and keep you.

 May God’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

 May God look upon you with kindness and give you peace.

 Amen.

**Rev. Christopher St. G. Davis** is the Minister for the Deloraine Melita Tilston Pastoral Charge in Southwest Manitoba near to foot of the Turtle Mountain. Rev. Davis has been an ordained minister of the United Church of Canada for three years. He hails from the island of Jamaica from which he migrated to Canada in 2018 with his wife and three young children.

**Marie Claude Manga** is a retired ordained UCC minister serving with a Sunday afternoon French-speaking community of Mount Royal United Church in Montreal. She is a retired social worker (MSW) and worked at Quebec provincial local community services centre such as CLSC and CSAI. She has served on variety of UCC bodies and is currently serving on the UCC Admission Board and in Nakonha:ka Regional Council.