# Called to Be the Church: Lectionary Worship Starters 2024

## Epiphany: Jan. 14─Feb. 11, 2024

### Theme Hymns

VU 82 A Light Is Gleaming  
MV 161 I Have Called You by Your Name

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| **Week 1**  **Stewardship as Spiritual Practice** | **Week 2**  **Inspire: Local Mission** | **Week 3**  **Inspire: Mission & Service** | **Week 4**  **Invite** | **Week 5**  **Thank** |
| 1 Samuel 3:1‒10 (11‒20). We are hard wired for relationship. A spiritual practice is something we “put ourselves before God” and intentionally open ourselves to God's presence. In this passage, Samuel is doing just that, as he “ministers to the LORD.”  Over the next few weeks, we will be undertaking the spiritual practice of stewardship and generosity. How do we use all that we have, to show our love for God and for our neighbours? How can we be generous with our possessions, our time, and ourselves?  This is a time to pay attention and care for our relationship with God—who knows us better than we know ourselves. How do you listen more fully for God's voice in your life? Like Samuel, God may surprise us. | Jonah 3:1‒5, 10. God is so amazing and inspiring that the ending of the story is never as certain as we think it is.  What is the amazing, inspiring thing that your community of faith does?  Please note, the inspiring things may be small and unnoticeable to many. God called Jonah to love the Ninevites and share God’s message. The Ninevites simply stopped eating for a while and put on different clothes. They didn’t solve poverty, or create a new and lasting peace with their enemies.  Sitting with a lonely senior for an hour and listening to their stories is an inspiring story of helping to relieve isolation and loneliness.  So what are the inspiring things your community of faith does in Jesus’ name? | Psalm 111 starts with a reminder that we do this as a community.  God is gracious and merciful. God does wonderful deeds. Food is provided; justice and righteousness are increased.  What is our response to God’s grace? Out of gratitude, we honour God’s grace through our own generosity, our own faithfulness, our care for all of God’s beloved.  When we are generous in relationship with others, when we respond as community together, when our Mission and Service partners transform lives, the promise of nourishment is fulfilled.  Suggested Mission and Service stories:  [Compassion into Action](https://united-church.ca/stories/compassion-action)  [Improving Lives and Livelihoods of Rural Farmers](https://united-church.ca/stories/improving-lives-and-livelihoods-rural-farmers) | Mark 1:29‒39. On this Sunday of invitation, we read about a lot of people asking Jesus for healing. Jesus is clear about his purpose and calling (Mk.1:38), and so he heals them.  When were you recently asked to be generous and you were generous?  What was it about the invitation that resonated with you and with your purpose and calling as a disciple?  And how will you respond to the invitation to be generous for the purpose and calling of your community of faith? | Psalm 50:1‒6. THANK-YOU for all the ways that you are faithful to God’s covenant, for the ways you show up on behalf of God and God’s beloved.  The Psalmist declares that out of Zion, God shines forth. Thank you for all the ways that God’s love is shining forth in your relationships, in your compassion and generosity, for the sake of God’s beloved world. |

## Lent: Feb. 18─Mar. 17, 2024

### Theme Hymns

MV 78 God Weeps  
VU 120 O Jesus, I Have Promised

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| Mark 1:9‒15. The Gospel according to Mark is the bare bones “to the point” gospel. The story is spare and moves quickly. It reminds us that much of what we have and have accumulated is perhaps not necessary. What has our community of faith collected that we could let go of? What about we as individual disciples? What can we give away and still be content?  Giving and generosity (stewardship) are a spiritual practice that is central to your growing as a disciple. | Mark 8:31‒38. Our Christian understanding of grace and gift is not transactional. As Jesus points out to us today, there is absolutely nothing we can give in payment for the life God gives. Generosity is our faith lived out. When we give in ways that are not reciprocral and quid pro quo, we are participating in God’s economics.  How does your community of faith make a difference in people’s lives today? How are you living into your God-given purpose for the world? How are you participating in God’s economics of grace and gift for all in your local community? | John 2:13‒22. A continuation of last week’s message. Contrary to the dominant culture we live in, worship and community of faith life is not a marketplace, and people are not commodities or resources to be used. Jesus upsets the status quo of marketplace wisdom to love us as siblings, each beloved by God.  One key way that we recognize one another as whole and worthy is our work through Mission and Service. Mission and Service is one way we work in relationship with others around the world to care and honour each other, and God. | John 3:14‒21 (v. 21). Good generous living in Jesus. When we respond to the invitation to give with generosity, there is a ripple that goes out that is attractive and invitational. We are invited this morning to love like God loves, to love generously and without measure. God gives of God’s self, recklessly, in vulnerability and in hope.  If you are inspired by the life-changing gift of this kind of love, please consider a generous gift as your faithful response. | John 12:20‒33 (v. 30). Once again, God provides. So once again we are given the opportunity to respond. Our first response can be one of gratitude and thanks. “Glory to your name, O God! Thank you for all you do for our sake.”  And likewise, thank you for all you do for the sake of Jesus and your faithful living as part of this community of faith. (Give some examples from your community of faith.) |

## Post-Easter: Apr. 7─May 5, 2024

### Theme Hymns

VU 178 Because You Live O Christ  
MV 138 My Love Colours Outside the Lines

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| Acts 4:32‒35. Easter changes everything. For the earliest church, stewardship as a spiritual practice meant redistributing wealth to those in need. “There was not a needy person among them.” Imagine fearless generosity. It requires trust. You will be cared for by the community, so you can give generously “to a ridiculous degree.” Overcoming our sense of self-preservation and trusting in God is the ultimate call of Jesus and practice of the Spirit. | Acts 3:12‒19. Easter changes everything. This text is Peter’s response to people after they witnessed the disciples healing a person. Read the rest of chapter 3 for context.  How do we explain why we do the inspiring things we do as a community of faith living out our calling? Tell some of those inspiring stories, and link them to our desire to faithfully follow Jesus. | Earth Day  Acts 4:5‒12. Easter changes everything. A continuation of last week’s theme. Again the disciples are connecting the good things they are doing with faith in Jesus.  On Earth Day, we acknowledge that care for the planet is also connected to faith in Jesus. Caring for the Earth matters to God.  Mission and Service helps people around the world to care for the Earth. | Acts 8:26‒40. Easter changes everything.  The passage is full of invitations to which people respond, “Yes!”  8:26 ‒ angel invites Phillip to go  8:29 ‒ go to the chariot  8:31 ‒ Ethiopian invites Phillip into the chariot  8:38 ‒ Phillip invites Ethiopian to be baptized  If at any time either of these people had refused an invitation, the story would not have happened.  Today you are being invited to help this community of faith create an amazing story. Please say, “Yes!” | Acts 10:44‒48. Easter changes everything.  A church for everyone.  Isn’t this an amazing story?! The outsiders are in!! God’s love is transgressive—breaking boundaries and shattering the status quo. How astonishing that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are poured out on EVERYONE.  Thank you for all the ways you express this amazing love in your life, in your community of faith, and in the world. |

## 28 Days to Thanksgiving: Sept. 15‒Oct. 13, 2024

### Theme Hymns

VU 506 Take My Life and Let It Be  
VU 582 There’s a Spirit in the Air

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| Running through each lectionary passage is the idea of spiritual practice. A spiritual practice sets our mind on divine things rather than human things (Mk. 8:33), deepens our faith, and brings us closer to God and/or our neighbour. Today we talk about another spiritual practice, generosity. Talk about why you give and how it deepens your faith, and how generosity brings you closer to God and others. | Mark 9:37. “Whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” What does it mean to welcome God? Where, in our wider community, do we discover the face of the Divine in the faces of our neighbours? Tell inspiring stories of how your community of faith is building sacred relationships, tending to the vulnerable, and being a “servant of all.” | Mark 9:41. How often in our colonial-shaped understanding do we see Mission and Service as something we do for others? Yet Jesus points to relationship with others that goes beyond quid pro quo into mutual collaboration for the sake of all of God’s beloved community. Generosity benefits those who receive and those who give. What can you learn from the experiences of United Church partners in Mission and Service as your generosity to Mission and Service deepens your faith and brings you closer to God? | Mark 10:13─16. We are all invited to come to Jesus. No exceptions.  This is the invitation to discipleship to which we must each respond.  As we practise generosity with our money and possessions, as we pray, as we invite others, as we worship, as we care for each other, we continue to walk in the Way of Jesus and grow deeper in faith. Hebrews states: Jesus is not ashamed to call us siblings. Today we each are invited to live as siblings of Christ. | Use the lectionary readings for Thanksgiving Sunday.  Gratitude: the greatest antidote to anxiety and fear and greed. Be thankful!!  Gratitude and contentment go hand in hand.  Offer people an opportunity to do some specific thanking. |

## World Communion to All Saints Day: Oct. 6─Nov. 3, 2024

### Theme Hymns

VU 707 For the Faithful Who Have Answered  
MV 147 God Help Us to Treasure

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| Proper 21  World-Wide Communion Sunday. Today’s gospel lesson is a challenging choice for World Communion Sunday. Relationships, and their breakdown, are never easy. Yet, if anything, we are reminded today that spiritual practices allow God to shape us. Spiritual practices provide a foundation to support us, especially when we are human and vulnerable. Spiritual practices help us to recognize that we are not in this life alone. Giving thanks, giving of our possessions and money, being generous are such spiritual practices. | Proper 22  Use the lectionary readings for Thanksgiving Sunday.  What does this community of faith do to be thankful for?  “I give thanks that my community of faith…” | Proper 23  Mark 10:35─45. The Way of Jesus is counter-cultural. The ways of power in the world are reversed.  Jesus calls us to relationships of mutual respect and self-chosen servanthood.  Your generosity to Mission and Service is not just “throwing money” at problems. It is truly another way you choose to follow Jesus. | Proper 24  Mark 10:46─52. Today you are invited to share and be generous. I invite you to throw off your cloak and spring into action (Mk. 10:50). | All Saints Day  In our Christian tradition, our funerals are often known as “celebrations of life.” We acknowledge the grief, we lament the loss, but we are not left there. Our Christian hope holds tears and joy together. As we remember and celebrate those “saints” who have gone before us, we give thanks that, as Revelation 21:3─5 and our New Creed remind us, “In life, in death, in life beyond death, we are not alone. God is with us. Thanks be to God.”  Let us give thanks for what we have, for what we can do with it to change the world, and for God’s love ever with us. |

[Community of Faith Stewardship](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/community-faith-stewardship)

[Stewardship in Worship](https://united-church.ca/worship-theme/stewardship-worship)