# The Pursuit of Right Relations

*by Alf Dumont. Used by permission from Mandate, May 2005 Special Edition.*

A worship service outline marking the 20 years since the United Church gave its apology to First Nations peoples.

## Call to Worship

### Option 1

**Leader**: We open ourselves to the One who gave us life.
We bring ourselves before God, our Creator.

**People: We come to pray,
we come to sing, and
we come to dance
for the Spirit of God has called us.**

**Leader**: We come seeking insight, teaching, and hope
for our community and our lives.

**People: You, O God, are the centre of our circle.
You are the centre of our lives.
We enter into worship with grateful hearts.**

### Option 2

**Leader**: O God, our Creator,
you bring us into being and you guide us throughout life.
We are thankful that you have called us into this circle of worship today.

**People: We thank you for the teaching: that we are to respect one another.
We thank you for the teaching: that all are equal in the circle.
We thank you for the teaching: that we have been called to create "right relations" with each other.
Be with us as we share together and grow spiritually.**

**Leader**: We are thankful for this day.
We are thankful to be in this circle of life with each other.
Through your sacredness, O God, we are made sacred.
May we experience your presence through our sharing on this day.

## Opening Prayer

### Option 1

**Leader**: Creator, as we gather

* we remember our history as people of this land
* we acknowledge how difficult it is for us to share this land with each other
* we acknowledge how challenged we become when we are asked to truly respect the ways of others

We come today to seek your will, as we continue to grow in spirit. Help us to be humble, open, caring, and loving people. Help us to share ourselves fully with others. Amen.

### Option 2

**Leader**: God of all life, through the Elders we have been taught to walk in this world in a gentle way, always respecting the life you have given to the animal and the plant world, and respecting the ways of other human beings. We come this morning with respect in our hearts for all that is yours and all we will come in contact with today. Help us to share in a good way with each other and to know fully that you are with us in all we do. Meegwetch (Thank you).

## Hymn

* VU 103 "How Good, Lord, to Be Here"
* VU 229 "God of the Sparrow"

## Prayer of Confession

### Option 1

**Leader**: O Creator of life, you help us to face the truth about ourselves.

**All: So we confess how difficult it is for us to change our attitudes towards others. Twenty years have passed since the apology:**

* **We confess how hard it is to remember the words of apology we spoke to our brothers and sisters.**
* **We confess how hard it is to remain focused on our intention to be faithful to our own words.**
* **We confess how hard it is to live out the apology we made.**

**SILENCE**

**O Creator of life, you help us to face the truth about ourselves.
O life-giving Spirit, humbly bring us to new life in you and with each other. Amen.**

### Option 2

**Leader**: The drum does not beat alone, nor does the heart, in the circle of life.

**All: How difficult it has been, O Creator, for us to be humble and caring. We so easily forget your teachings of the just and right relationships that we are to have with each other, as brothers and sisters, in this land. We so easily forget that our responsibility carries from generation to generation for all those who are hurt and oppressed and denied their place in the circle of life-those who still need our support, who need justice and peace. How difficult it is for us to remain humble as we walk the road of life. May we find peace so that we might share peace that is genuine and real, and help others to know peace within. Spirit of life, help us to walk the road of integrity back to the circle of life, where we will be truly joined by all our brothers and sisters. Meegwetch Che Manido (Thank you Great Spirit).**

## Prayer for Assurance

## Option 1

**Leader**: Let your breath, O God, fill us with life anew, that we might love as you love and do what you would do.
Let us know the peace that comes from good relations with each other and with you. Amen.

### Option 2

**Leader**: The Creator has chosen to walk with us. We are blessed.

## Hymn

* VU 238: "O Lord My God"
* VU 271: "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"
* VU 701: "What Does the Lord Require of You?"

## Children's Story

## Scripture

* 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
* Philippians 2:1-11
* Hebrews 10:15-18, 23-25
* Psalm 91:9-16 (Voices United 807 for responsive reading)
* John 12:20-36
* Luke 13:10-17

## Hymn

* VU 808: "Psalm 91, On Eagle's Wings"
* VU 703: "In the Bulb There Is a Flower"

## Sermon

* "Pursuing Right Relations"

## Offering

## Prayer

*As many of us in the First Nations community who were connected to The United Church of Canada waited for the General Council to consider offering an apology to the First Nations people, we were told by our Elders in the All Native Circle, "Whatever the United Church decides, we will dance!"*

## A Litany (A prayer with eyes opened)

**Leader**: Twenty years ago, many courageous voices shared stories of their abuse within the residential schools that were run by the churches. Tears were shed! Many sat stunned in silence! Many were stirred to action! Many prayed! Many more began to share because of the courage of others!

**People: Our Elders told us to dance! We dance when times are difficult and challenging! We will dance together, as we continue to share our stories!**

**Leader**: Twenty years ago we built a fire while we waited for the words to be shared. Twenty years ago we prayed together as we stood in a circle around the fire. We prayed for the courage to dance if the decision from the council to give an apology was "No!"

**People: Our Elders told us to dance! We want to dance even when our legs have become weak and our voices have become frozen with fear and anger. Our Elders told us to dance! We will dance together!**

**Leader**: Twenty years ago we prayed together as we stood in a circle around the fire. We prayed for the strength to dance if the decision by the council to give an apology was "Yes!"

**People: Our Elders told us to dance! We want to dance together with those who bring the good news of hope and the good news of peace. We will dance together!**

**Leader**: Twenty years ago, we began the dance as we heard the beat of the drum! While we danced, members of the council came into our circle to share their decision!

**People: We danced while the Elders and the Moderator talked.**

**Leader**: Twenty years ago, The United Church of Canada spoke these words to the First Nations people gathered around the intentionally unfinished cairn at Laurentian University in Sudbury: "We offer this apology to you…"

**People**: We danced! The apology began as we danced, and the apology continues to be lived out as we continue to dance-as we continue to dance together! Let it be so! SELAH! AMEN.

## Hymn

* VU 684: "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace"
* VU 691: "Though Ancient Walls"

## Benediction

**Leader**: Go now, as the Spirit of life has called you:

* to be a people of grace
* to be a people of truth
* to be a people who pursue peace
* to be a people who forgive
* to be a people who remember
* to be a people who love
* to be a people who honour others in the pursuit of right relations

And may God go with you. Amen.

*The Rev. Alf Dumont served as the first Speaker of the All Native Circle Conference when it was formally constituted by the United Church in 1988. He is currently the minister at St. John's Pastoral Charge in Alliston, Ontario.*