Stories from the Heart

Worship Service for Pride Sunday

The United Church’s official Pride Sunday takes place the first Sunday in June and celebrates the lives and ministry of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people. This Pride worship service was created by Linda Hutchinson for use on June 10, 2018 at Sydenham Street United Church, Kingston, Ont.

Preparation Notes

Materials: Have a series of coloured candles to represent the Pride rainbow and light each candle as indicated.

Stories for Reflection: Invite three individuals (LGBTQIA2S+ people, allies, family, and/or friends) to prepare and share stories during the Reflection time.

Gathering

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Acknowledging the Territory

For more information, visit the [Worship Theme: Indigenous](https://www.united-church.ca/worship-theme/indigenous) page and download the resource *Acknowledging the Territory in Worship* found under “Extras.”

A Moment for Pride

It is a privilege to lead worship this morning. May it be a meaningful and spirit-filled time for all of us!

On June 10, 1925, The United Church of Canada was born after much consultation, compromise, and listening for the Spirit. In 1988, The United Church of Canada decided that sexual orientation would no longer be a barrier to membership in the United Church and hence to candidacy for ministry. In 2009, gender identity was added to that decision. Today we celebrate Pride in many United Churches across the country.

Some of us come today celebrating and knowing lots about Pride. Some come today celebrating and knowing a little about Pride. And some of us come today not sure what to expect but here to learn what we can. So, let’s begin with a bit of background.

Pride is a positive stance against discrimination and violence toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and gender-fluid people. Pride is also a chance to promote self-affirmation, dignity, equality, and fundamental human rights, and to celebrate in a safe environment.

The Pride Parade has its roots in a 1970 march in New York City, which marked this LGBTQ community’s first resistance to police brutality, oppression, and human rights violations that had resulted in the Stonewall riots a year earlier, in 1969. Since the 1980s, this liberation movement has morphed into the Pride movement. Parades, festivities, and celebrations are held to mark improved rights for this marginalized community, supported by allies of all walks of life, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.

*(Note: Get more information on LGBTQ history in the United Church by visiting the* [*Gender and Sexuality*](https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/gender-and-orientation) *page; see in particular the timelines available under “Downloads.”* *Also consider exploring Wikipedia’s page on* [*LGBTQ History in Canada*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_LGBT_history_in_Canada)*.)*

With this context, today we are celebrating Pride by hearing some of our own Pride stories.

Lighting of the Red Candle

We light the red candle, symbolizing life in all its richness.

Come, let us worship, learn, and celebrate together.

Opening Hymn

“Let us Build a House” (MV 1)

“Find a Home Here” by Mary-Ellen Kish (available for download on the [Pride Sunday](https://www.united-church.ca/worship-special-days/pride-sunday) page under “Music”)

Opening Prayers

One: Creating God—God beyond Gender,

**All: who makes no mistakes,**

**who surprises us always,**

**who molded the first person both male and female,**

**who molded the first non-gendered human**

**who loves all creation.**

One: Help us love the diversity of your creation.

**All: Help us accept all varieties of gender in ourselves and in others.**

One: Help us celebrate those who are different from us

**All: That we may learn to love each other as you love us,**

**We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, both human and divine.**

*—Used by permission of Rev. Cindy Bourgeois, Wesley United Church, Regina, Sask.**For more information, see the devotional* [*The First Gender Reassignment Surgery*](http://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional_the_first_gender_assignment_surgery) *from the United Church of Christ.*

One: Creating God—God of Mercy,

**All: As we have acknowledged the diversity in this amazing world, created in atoms and molecules but with an underlying spirit of mystery, we must also admit that, at times, we have forgotten of the wonders of that diversity.**

**We have longed for things to be familiar and as they have always been.**

**We know that the great religious traditions have caused harm in the past and continue to cause harm and pain to those who express their being in ways different than the majority.**

**We know, too, that we individually, both intentionally and unintentionally, have rejected and shunned those who are not like us.**

**For this we are truly sorry and ask your patience as we learn and strive for ways to be more inclusive and celebrate all in this wondrous world.**

**Amen.**

Lighting of the Orange Candle

We light the orange candle, symbolizing healing.

As scripture assures, “If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.” (Psalm 139:9–10 NRSV)

Hymn

“Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom” (MV 10), verse 1

“Come, O Holy Spirit, Come” (VU 383)

Listening for Wisdom

Scripture

Acts 15:5–13

*(Note: It is recommended that* The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language *be used for this scripture reading. It is available for free online through* [*Bible Study Tools*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/msg/acts/15.html)*. If using* The Message *translation, use the following introduction.)*

The scripture we have chosen for this morning is from Acts 15 in *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language.* This reading is a call to “embrace those who are marginalized.” In other words, “to be radically inclusive.”

In the chapters just prior to the 15th chapter, Peter, a devout Jewish person, has a vision of a large sheet coming down from heaven containing all sorts of animals, many of them considered unclean and therefore not to be eaten according to Jewish law. But Peter hears God say very clearly, “Go to it, Peter; kill and eat.” When Peter objects that he cannot eat meat that is not kosher, God says, “If God says it is OK, it is OK!” This happens three times. With the help of others, Peter discerns that God was saying that the Jewish God was for everybody including the Gentiles—non-Jewish people who were, by law, considered unclean. With this background, we come to Acts 15 where, in a church in Antioch, Peter and Barnabas are reporting on their visits with the non-Jewish people.

*(Read* [*Acts 15:5–13*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/msg/acts/15.html)*.)*

Listen for Peter’s words as we might imagine them in our theme today:

"Friends, you well know that, from early on, God made it quite plain that God wanted members of the LGBTQ community to hear the message of this good news and embrace it—not in any secondhand or roundabout way, but firsthand, straight from my mouth. And God, who can't be fooled by any pretense on our part but always knows a person's thoughts, gave them the Holy Spirit exactly as God gave the Spirit to us. God treated the outsiders exactly as God treated us.”

We are grateful for the wisdom revealed in these words of scripture, in each other and in ourselves. Amen.

Lighting of the Yellow Candle

We light the yellow candle, symbolizing sunlight.

Reflecting

As we reflect together, this part of the service will flow without announcements. We will rise in body or in spirit to sing our next hymn, after which we will hear three Pride stories. After each story, the storyteller will light a candle while we all remain seated and sing the verses of “Deep in Our Hearts” as indicated below.

Please rise now, in body or in spirit, and join in singing our next hymn.

Hymn

“Open My Eyes, That I May See” (VU 376)

“Open Our Hearts” (MV 21)

*(Note: Invite storytellers come forward at this time.)*

Pride Stories: Three Stories from LGBTQIA2S+ People, Allies, Family, and/or Friends

Story 1

Lighting of the Green Candle

We light the green candle, symbolizing nature.

Sung Response

“Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154), verse 1

Story 2

Lighting of the Blue Candle

We light the blue candle, symbolizing harmony.

Sung Response

“Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154), verse 2

Story 3

Lighting of the Purple Candle

We light the blue candle, symbolizing Spirit.

Sung Response

“Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154), verse 3

*(Storytellers return to their seats.)*

Responding

Offertory: Gathering of Our Gifts

Our offerings will be received now as an expression of our gratitude for all our blessings.

Offertory Hymn

“For the Gift of Creation” (VU 538)

Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer

We continue with the prayers of the people, beginning with our personal prayers as we pray in silence. I will give some spoken words which will be followed by reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

Gracious and loving God, holy mystery, wholly love, we gather our personal reflections and corporate yearnings in these our silent prayers.

Empowering God, may your Spirit guide us in our personal celebrations and concerns. As a body of faith-filled people, may we also be guided in the celebrations and concerns of the gathered body. We celebrate the Pride stories we heard today and are grateful for the movement of your Spirit of love and inclusion both within the United Church and Canadian society. We pray that all people who feel excluded by families, faith communities, and society because of who they are may experience your love in their lives. We pray for peace and respect for all in this community, this country, and this world.

We pray for political leaders at all levels as they struggle to make the world a better place. We pray that the teachings of Jesus and those of other world faiths will work together to meet the challenges of our world today.

And in our own administrative and policy work at *(name of your faith community),* we pray for wisdom and careful consideration of the topics as we discuss them together in the days and months ahead.

For those amongst us who have personal challenges, have family members who need support, or anyone who is under stress, we pray that God’s gentle Spirit will bring peace, spiritual and physical healing.

In all of these celebrations and concerns, we are grateful that we can turn to the one who guides us in our lives, saying together… *(recite the Lord’s Prayer).*

Closing Hymn

Please rise in body or in spirit to sing.

“My Love Colours Outside the Lines” (MV 138)

“I Cannot Dance, O Love” (VU 534)

Commissioning

This morning we have lit candles:

Red for life in all its forms,

Orange for healing,

Yellow for sunlight and all kinds of light,

Green for nature in all her diversity,

Blue for harmony, and

Purple for the Spirit which guides us all.

We are called to practice this rainbow of colours in our lives—in the conversations and interactions in our lives at home, at work, and at play—as we go out into our community and the world to share the message that God’s love is for everyone!

Sung Blessing

“May God’s Sheltering Wings” (MV 214)

May the Blessing of God Be upon You (VU 429)

Postlude

*—This worship service was created by Linda Hutchinson. Linda is the Eastern Canada Affirming Ministries Coordinator for Affirm United’s* [*Affirming Ministries Program*](http://affirmunited.ause.ca/affirming-ministries-program/)*, and an active member of Sydenham Street United Church in Kingston, Ont. She and her partner, Bruce, are advocates for celebrating the presence of the LGBTQ community in the life and work of the United Church and society.*