

Believe It! God's Riches Are Here!

Preparation for Worship

Here are some things you may do to help prepare for the service:

- Consider making M&S and WDR educational materials available, such as Minutes for Mission and Mandate Special Edition to anyone who might like to learn more about global partnerships
- Order WDR bulletin covers for worship from the UCRD
- Post the WDR poster
- Create a special bulletin board or PowerPoint presentation using quotes and scripture along with stories, maps, photos and resources from the United Church of Canada website
- Request a global partnership audio-visual presentation available from AVEL for use during or after service
- Photocopy the Call to Worship, Call to Confession, Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness to use as a bulletin insert (the text can also be downloaded from the united-church.ca website at www.united-church.ca/files/planning/theme/wdr_insert.pdf)
- Consider having a special WDR offering using the offering envelopes that can be ordered from the United Church Distribution Centre.

Worship Service

Call to Worship

Leader: God calls us again and again.

All: In worship we hear this call.

Leader: God invites us over and over.

All: In awe and wonder we respond.

Leader: God's Spirit surrounds us.

All: In anticipation we offer our praise.

Leader: Let us worship God together.

Welcome and Introduction

Today, our congregation is celebrating the work of our global partners and celebrating how we share in this work through the Mission and Service Fund and World Development Relief.

The Mission and Service Fund is the core central fund of our United Church of Canada. Most M&S monies go to support the work of the whole church, however, one can designate these funds to go to partnership and emergent relief work overseas by giving to the World Development Relief. Through WDR

United Church folk work with partners around the world to take part in the mission of Christ by combating long-term poverty, responding to emergencies, protecting refugees, and advocating for change.

Sometimes, when we see all the need in the world the poverty, crisis, wars and disasters—we feel overwhelmed and wonder what we can do. But Jesus has given us the strength and the opportunity to respond. Today, we remember how our gifts can serve God's work and do God's will. Today we are reminded how, in God's hands, our gifts have the power to lift spirits, to spark hope, to nurture love and transform lives. Come, let us worship God.

Hymn

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty #220

Unison Prayer of Approach

*O God of wonder, Creator of all life,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
In Christ
you came to us as a refugee,
lost and alone in an uncertain world.
Washing the feet of the disciples,
you revealed true service.
And so we come before you in deepest awe;
we voice our joy with songs of praise.
Accept our worship and hear our prayers
for we long to feel your presence and
to know deep in our hearts
that you journey with us.*

*Merciful Lord, full of compassion,
we confess that too often
our lives are bound by worry
and our vision is limited.
We stop listening to others
or sharing each other's concerns.*

*Forgive us for choosing the safe path,
the familiar road and the easy way.
Help us to be people
who love and care for each other.
Blow the wind of your Spirit
through the deepest places of our lives,
clearing away clutter and confusion,
until your love pours through us freely.
In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

Sung Response:

Lord, have mercy #947

(Repeat three times in Latin, English and French)

Assurance of Forgiveness

Leader: God, who is holy,
is also full of grace.
Know that you are forgiven.
Have the courage to forgive one another
and be at peace.

Thanks be to God
who taught us to pray:

All: *Lord's Prayer*

Passing the Peace

Leader: As God forgives us,
let us share the peace of Christ.

The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

Leader: Now let us share the peace with one another.

All are invited to share the peace with one another

Hymn

Send me, Lord / Thuma Mina #572

(To be sung in English and Zulu)

Children's Focus

(See page 6)

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 25:6-10a

Responsive Psalm 104:1-23

(refrain # 1)

John 12:20-32

Hymn

Hallelujah
#958

Sample Sermon

(See page 8)

Hymn

O for a world where
everyone #697

Offering our Gifts

Doxology
For the Gift of Creation #538

Prayer of Dedication

Self-giving God,
we give you thanks for all the blessings we know in this life
and for the opportunity to give back.
Use our offerings and our service
to touch human lives and communities
with the gentleness of your grace
and the vitality of your goodness.
This we offer in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

Prayers of the People (with congregation's refrain)

God of grace and compassion,
we bring before you the widening circles of our lives.
We lift up those closest and dearest to us
and name them with affection and gratitude
knowing that your love reaches
into the very depths of their needs
and celebrates the joys of their journeys.

We are awed by your goodness.
May your blessings flow through us and beyond us.
We celebrate the life of your church,
the community of people whose worship and service
continues to deepen our faith in Jesus Christ
and challenges us to live what we believe.

**We are awed by your goodness.
May your blessings flow through us and beyond us.**

We are especially mindful this day of our Mission and Service Fund and its work through World Development & Relief. We remember our partners and their ministries, and ask that your Spirit guide these projects with wisdom and courage, with joy and hope.

**We are awed by your goodness.
May your blessings flow through us and beyond us.**

In the midst of sudden and overwhelming crises that cry out for response throughout the world, you have given us the gift of this agency to act swiftly.

**We are awed by your goodness.
May your blessings flow through us and beyond us.**

We think of the many communities experiencing the ravages of HIV and AIDS, sustained conflict and violence, widespread drought or severe flooding, crowded quarters in refugee compounds, a yearning for education and a struggle for freedom. So we join our prayers with theirs that, in a world of so much abundance, radical sharing may inspire hope.

**We are awed by your goodness.
May your blessings flow through us and beyond us.**

We are in awe of your goodness and feel the unity of our common humanity, as well as the boldness of your Spirit, so we offer these and all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, who loved the world and gave his life to redeem it. Amen.

Hymn

We are one as we come #402

Commissioning

Go, knowing that your life has been touched by grace.
Go, convinced that you are connected to a larger world.
Go, filled with the love of the Gospel of Christ.

Benediction

May the blessing of God who loves you, be yours;
the blessing of Jesus, the crucified, be yours;
the blessing of the Spirit, who resides in you,
be yours, now and forever.

Choral Amen

Children's Focus

"The Giving Chain"

Theme: "Whoever serves me must follow me." (John 12:26)

We want our children to understand that God calls each and every one of us to follow in the way of Jesus. "To follow" means to share who we are and what we have with other people. God gives each of us the ability and the heart to do important things that make a difference. We can learn to be open to Jesus' leading so that we can follow and serve him faithfully!

You will need:

- Sheets of construction paper cut into strips
- A pair of scissors
- Tape
- Several markers

Step 1 Begin creating a giving chain — have children brainstorm (and adults too!) ways we can and do serve others. You could ask a question like this: "What can/do we do to serve others — as individuals, as a church, as Christians, as families, etc.?"

Step 2 As people brainstorm, invite older children/youth to write ideas down on strips of construction paper (one idea for each strip of paper). Write down 5 or 6 ideas. (You may want to have a few ideas tucked into the back of your mind to get the wheels turning.) After people have finished brainstorming, add one of your own ideas — an example of what our church is doing (perhaps through World Development and Relief gifts to the Mission and Service Fund) to serve others.

- Step 3** While talking with children about how God calls us to serve him by following in Jesus' way, begin linking the chain together.
- Talk about how Jesus always reached out to other people — was always there to listen and share and help and be a friend.
 - Talk about how God uses each and every one of us to show God's love throughout the entire world — this chain is an example of how we can show love by following in the way of Jesus.
 - These ideas that we've come up with here... these are only the beginning! God helps us discover many ways to serve and to be disciples. We just need to ask God.
- Step 4** Give a blank strip of construction paper to each child and invite them to think and pray this week about a way they can serve God by serving someone. (Provide some ideas — sharing, showing love, etc.) Encourage children to bring their paper chain link back next week with their thoughts written on it. Explain that you will add to the chain during next week's children's focus.
- Step 5** Pray together.
- Step 6** Consider displaying your chain in the sanctuary.

The following week:

- Step 7** Make sure you have extra blank strips of construction paper available the following week. (Some people may forget their chain link, or will not have been present the previous Sunday.) Before worship begins, invite people to write something on a chain link. (You could even include links and instructions in the bulletin and have children collect them during children's time and add them to the growing chain.)
- Step 8** Celebrate how the chain has grown and in turn how amazing God is because we were helped to learn how to follow in Jesus' way, by loving, caring and reaching out to others.

Sample Sermon

Isaiah 25:6-10a; Ps. 104:1-23 and John 12:20-32

World Development & Relief is one way we can reach out and touch the lives of people around the world. WDR is the faithful response of United Church folk in Canada to emergencies, conflict, poverty and injustice. In the face of what can feel like insurmountable challenges, we draw strength from the committed and unwavering dedication of our partners.

A first glimpse of the mountains just north of the Vancouver airport can be utterly amazing. Many have marvelled at the magnificence of the mountains in Banff. Their stunning beauty is beyond words.

Such experiences are easy to recall when one reads that ancient vision of a mammoth mountainside banquet in Isaiah 25. Those first to receive this vibrant picture must have found it unbelievable—especially when their lives in the small nation of Judah were so often impoverished, threatened and ravaged by the surrounding world.

The location of Mount Zion was in itself impressive but the sumptuous feast would be more than any of them could possibly have anticipated—a lavish multi-course meal of the finest delicacies accompanied by carefully selected vintage wines. But to think that their table fellowship (for that is really what it was) would include such an impressive cross-section of all peoples baffled the imagination. When God throws a party, nothing, it seems, was held back! In every way the scene was extraordinary.

As if all of this was not already spectacular, even more was promised. The vision, like a dream, abruptly shifts from a banquet to what appears to be more like a funeral scene. A gigantic shroud hangs heavy over what one assumes are dead bodies prepared for burial. But wait! Suddenly a powerful gust of wind catches the shroud and carries it off into oblivion. Death itself, it seems, has been swallowed up and the tears of loss appear to be wiped away forever. The Jewish people will no longer experience humiliation. God's *shalom* has become universal peace; the God of the banquet is a God of life, abundant life.

Of course, God has always been a God of lavish generosity. Read the opening chapter of the Bible and you see a litany of the unfolding of creation marked by the repeated refrain, "and it was good," "and it was good," until finally it ends with, "and it was very good!" The abundance and fruitfulness of the earth and all of its creatures point to a Creator who is inexhaustible goodness.

The psalmist in Psalm 104 has captured this superabundance. Springs gush, animals are fed, the earth is satisfied, wine gladdens the heart and oil makes faces shine. The psalmist has to break into doxology: "O LORD, how manifold are your works!"

All of this might seem hard for us as readers to accept. This picture of reckless exuberance is much too far from our everyday reality. There is, however, a deeper reason for reticence. This picture contradicts a central aspect of our culture which is not focused on abundance but on scarcity. Not enough land. Not enough food. Not enough water. Not enough money. Not enough time. Not enough of whatever we think we need at any given moment. Little wonder that we often feel overcome by a sense of overwhelming need and become paralyzed. As a result, many

have given up on the possibility of genuine hope. Where does one find hope in the midst of challenging odds?

For a decade, downtown Managua remained a city deeply scarred by the 1972 Nicaraguan earthquake. Many buildings were still missing at least one wall from top to bottom. The cathedral was a shambles; the walls on all sides rose only a few feet. It was roofless—totally open to the sky and overgrown with weeds. But in the midst of all this destruction, our United Church partner, the Moravia church through the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD) was busy providing interest-free loans to assist the surrounding community. These loans enabled ordinary peasant workers to dig a well, inoculate some chickens, and tackle a myriad of other projects. The Council believed that abundance existed and that it could be shared through them to people in dire need. Thanks, in part, to the ongoing support of WDR, that organization is still active today, working to bring new futures of hope and opportunity to people in need.

The Mayan hills in Guatemala are very steep but amazingly terraced into a patchwork quilt of vegetable gardens. Each plot, barely the size of an average backyard, is packed full of luscious, leafy vegetables thanks to the dedication of a United Church partner, the Fraternidad of Maya Presbyterials. Workers from the community share their implements, a long watering hose and their joy in working side by side. Abundance! O such abundance!

Not far away, on another precarious-looking hillside, a work crew of young Canadians built a cinder block school. The parents of the pupils gathered on a Saturday morning to tell the story of how all this came about. There had been a local school nearby but it required young children to cross a busy, winding road. Many had been injured and a number had been killed. They needed their own school. It was precisely the kind of project that our Canadian young people were more than ready to provide. The gratitude of those parents was exuberant. Although several years had passed since the project came into being, the names and stories of these visitors from the north were still vivid.

Every year such stories from all over the world are slipped into the pages of the Minutes for Mission and other WDR materials. It is quite incredible when you connect it with what the Bible calls "blessing."

Blessing is always something added—well, actually, something multiplied would be more accurate. Remember the Gospels? There was Jesus on a hillside yearning to feed a vast congregation. His closest followers wanted to send the crowd home. Jesus told them to give the people something to eat first. They were confused; they felt inadequate. Where were they to get enough food for such a crowd? The money in their communal purse was hardly sufficient for themselves. They were overwhelmed by a sense of scarcity. But Jesus told them to bring him whatever they could find. It was just a few loaves and fishes—one boy's lunch! Jesus took this gift and blessed it. The result was not only adequate for everyone to be satisfied, but twelve basketfuls of leftovers were gathered afterwards! That blessing connected a seemingly inadequate and insignificant offering to the Giver of abundance. It was more than enough.

A few years ago, one of our partners expressed deep gratitude for the gifts that had been received from the World Development & Relief, Mission and Service Fund. Then he added by way of affirmation, "Of course, such gifts are first given to God." Giving is spiritual before it is humanitarian. When we view what we have and what we need through this vital connection, the myth of scarcity is blown away—replaced by the blessing of abundance.

In the early summer of 2008, a Toronto congregation undertook the sponsorship of three young refugee women from a war-torn part of Africa. Their lives were devastated by the death of their parents and most of their siblings. Their four years in a refugee camp were harrowing. The

challenge of such a refugee sponsorship would be daunting. But a group of congregational volunteers came together to journey with these sisters and discovered a wonderful capacity for sustained caring, day after day, week after week, month after month. After a while, several in the group said that it was difficult to know who was more blessed in the process, their new friends from abroad or they themselves as volunteers. Their lives were expanded and touched deeply in this process because this became a journey of trust in the graciousness of God. To experience this graciousness is a special gift.

Underneath the vision of Isaiah 25, the abundance of God, the notion of blessing and experiences of hope is God's own self-giving. In John's Gospel, Jesus reveals this clearly and profoundly as he speaks about giving his own life for the sake of the world. He refers candidly to his own death. The cross, it turns out, represents not failure but triumph. The cross is the place of exaltation. Jesus says, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." The cross is the ultimate demonstration of God's compassion poured out in Jesus.

Here is the deep spiritual reality that transforms us from feeling anxious about not having enough. Here is a generosity that frees us from the tendency to protect our resources. Here we are enabled to be, to share, to risk. Here we see that God is committed to that ancient vision in Isaiah 25 of the mountainside banquet that welcomes a divided world to come together in celebration of God's *shalom*.

That vision of global peace and deep joy continues to inspire the work of The United of Canada and its partners around the world. We engage it through the Spirit of the crucified Christ whose love has no limits. Believe it! God's riches are here!