

## Pink Gift Sunday

*By Kevin Little*

*Suggested for use on "Joy" Sunday, the third Sunday in Advent*

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### **Preparation**

This intergenerational "Pink Gift" service, written by the Rev. Kevin Little at St. Luke's United Church in Upper Tantalon, NS, is offered for use on the traditional White Gift Sunday. Young people lead the worship. In addition to speaking parts, this can include greeting, ushering, and offering musical gifts.

The "Word" time in the service is a dramatic mime, juxtaposing a news story with the Bible text. To include more participants, use two or more narrators, each reading newspapers, as if they are reading pieces of the story to each other. Up to a dozen youth could each read one of the scripture sentences.

The youngest children can leave for Sunday school during the singing of "Halle, Halle, Halle." There, the teacher can talk with them about how it feels to be "new" in school or Sunday school. The children can make a simple greeting and place it in an envelope for the "Pink Gift Tree," printing on it the name of someone they know, possibly someone who is new in their school or a senior in the congregation. The envelopes can be stapled to a long white or pink ribbon.

The young people will be asked, in advance, to wear something pink today. Send notes home or send e-mails to their parents the week before. If they forget or do not have something pink, cut lengths of pink crepe paper to wear like a stole around the shoulders. The children return to the worship service at the end of the dramatic mime, in time to hang their envelopes on the Christmas tree at the front of the sanctuary.

Put announcements in the church bulletin on previous Sundays to tell about the shelter for women and children, where the special "pink" gifts will be taken. This will be specific to your local community and will require advance contact with the shelter to inquire about appropriate gifts. In bulletins, newsletters, and notes or e-mails to congregants, explain the kinds of gifts that will be appreciated, and invite participants to wrap them in pink or white paper.

Envelopes may be placed in the pews or in the bulletin for special gifts to the community ministry by people who did not bring "pink" gifts or who want to give money, too. Be sure to include a note in the bulletin about how cheques should be made out.

Place wagons at the doors to the sanctuary to receive the special gifts brought for the community ministry for women and children.

White Gift Sunday is a Sunday that teaches generosity. Today's service opens multiple doors for people to be generous—through envelopes on the tree, Mission and Service Fund gifts, the pink gifts for the shelter for women and children, and regular offerings.

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## The Approach

### Advent Candle Lighting

**Hymn:** "A Candle Is Burning" (*Voices United* 6, verses 1-3)

### Call to Worship

**One:** A voice is calling, calling in the wilderness,

**All:** "Prepare the way of the Lord."

### Prayer of Approach

**Child:** For me Christmas includes colours like red, white, green...

**Youth:** And pink!

**Parent:** At Christmas I hold on to blue, it is a warm, waiting colour.

**Youth:** And pink!

**Senior:** At Christmas I hold on to blue, it is a colour of hope, peace and love.

**Youth:** And pink!

**Child:** Let us pray together...

**All:** **With the hope and peace of Advent,  
our hearts await messages and messengers,  
confident you will answer.**

**Youth:** And we celebrate the joy of reaching out to each other this season and every season.

**All:** Amen.

**Hymn:** "Joy to the World" (VU 59)

### Prayer of Confession

**Child:** When hope walked in the room,

**All:** we focused on the negative.

**Adult:** When peace walked in the room,

**All:** we were too busy arguing.

**Youth:** When joy walked in the room,

**All:** we had forgotten who and what we are.

**Newcomer:** So when the stranger walks in the room,

**All:** We ask you, God, to stir us out of complacency, lift us out of conformity, and fit us for discipleship. Amen.

**Hymn:** "Halle, Halle, Halle" (VU 958)

*(Youngest children leave to gather in their Sunday school classes, where they will work on their envelopes to put on the tree later in the service.)*

## The Word

**Setting the Scene:** "Early One Morning" (English traditional)

*(Play this or other light music for background as participants come forward, then continue to play softly as the Narrator begins, finishing before the gospel reading.)*

### The Origins of White Gift Sunday

**Narrator:** White Gift Sunday began in 1904 at Painesville Methodist Church. The White Gift called for each person to give a gift of love, instead of receiving. At the suggestion of the minister's wife, Mrs. Winters, envelopes with donations were pinned to a white ribbon and

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draped on the Christmas tree. The service was held in the sanctuary, with each class marching to the tree and placing their ribbon of envelopes on the tree.

**Scripture: Matthew 11:2–10**

**Sunday School Student:** When John [the Baptist] heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'"

**The Drama: "What Is a Pink Gift?"**

*(Based, with permission, on a news story from the Halifax Chronicle-Herald, as downloaded from the Internet on September 24, 2007 <<www.thechronicleherald.ca/Search/858884.html>>, and acted out in mime by members of the Sunday school or youth group.)*

**Narrator:** *(reading from a newspaper)* Two students at Central Kings Rural High School fought back against bullying recently, unleashing a sea of pink after a new student was harassed and threatened when he showed up wearing a pink shirt.

**Youth:** *(holding a Bible, to indicate the reading is from the scripture just heard)* "Are you the one or are we to wait?"

**N:** The Grade 9 student arrived for the first day of school last Wednesday and was set upon by a group of six to 10 older students who mocked him, called him names for wearing pink, and threatened to beat him up.

**Youth:** *(reading from Bible)* "Go and tell what you have seen and heard."

**Narrator:** The next day, Grade 12 students David Shepherd and Travis Price decided something had to be done about bullying. "It's my last year. I've stood around too long and I wanted to do something," said David. They used the Internet to encourage people to wear pink and bought 75 pink tank tops for male students to wear. They handed out the shirts in the lobby before class last Friday—even the bullied student had one. "I made sure there was a shirt for him," David said. They also brought a pink basketball to school as well as pink material for headbands and arm bands. David and Travis figure about half the school's 830 students wore pink. It was hard to miss the mass of students in pink milling about in the lobby, especially for the group that had harassed the new Grade 9 student. "The bullies got angry," said Travis. "One guy was throwing chairs (in the cafeteria). We're glad we got the response we wanted." David said one of the bullies angrily asked him whether he knew pink on a male was a symbol of being gay. He told the bully that didn't matter to him and shouldn't to anyone. "Something like the colour of your shirt or pants, that's ridiculous," he said. "Our intention was to stand up for this kid so he doesn't get picked on." Travis said the bullies "keep giving us dirty looks, but we know we have the support of the whole student body. Kids don't need this in their lives, worrying about what to wear to school. That should be the last thing on their minds."

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "The deaf hear, good news comes to the poor."

**Narrator:** When the bullied student put on his pink shirt Friday and saw all the other pink in the lobby, "he was all smiles. It was like a big weight had been lifted off his shoulder," David said.

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "Blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me."

**Narrator:** Travis said that growing up, he was often picked on for wearing store-brand clothes instead of designer duds.

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "Did you come to see someone in soft robes in royal palaces?"

**Narrator:** The two said they didn't take the action looking for publicity, but rather to show leadership in combating what they say is frequent bullying in schools. (*puts down the newspaper*)

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "A prophet? Yes, a messenger!"

**Narrator:** Remember the words from Matthew?

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "Are you the one, or are we to wait?"

**Narrator:** Why do we wait so long to show our support to others?

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "Go and tell what you have seen and heard."

**Narrator:** Why do we wait so long to witness to what we have seen and heard?

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "The deaf hear...good news comes to the poor..."

**Narrator:** Where is this Good News? Here it comes when we stand with those who stand alone.

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "Blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me."

**Narrator:** Jesus said, "When I was a stranger, you welcomed me." Those who welcome the stranger receive Good News and the assurance of God's presence.

**Youth:** (*reading from Bible*) "Did you come to see someone in soft robes in royal palaces? A prophet? Yes, a messenger!"

**Narrator:** In 1904 at the first White Gift Sunday, "The service was held in the sanctuary, with each class marching to the tree and placing their ribbon of envelopes on the tree." Are we searching for someone in soft robes in a royal palace, or the promised one who lays in a manger because there was no room at the inn? Instead of looking for joy in a box or in the familiar faces known to us, why not look for those who stand alone? Today, we are celebrating this Sunday in Advent as a "Pink Gift Sunday." Our youngest Sunday school children will now rejoin us to place a ribbon and an envelope on the tree, the name of someone in their class, or a neighbour they want to wish a joyous Merry Christmas. As they do, please pray about whom you could welcome this Christmas. You may also write that name on the paper provided in the bulletin, then join the children in adding to the tree.

*(The children enter during the next hymn, all wearing pink. They hang their ribbon streamers with envelopes on the tree during the singing of the hymn, then return to sit with their families.)*

**Hymn:** "Wait for the Lord" (VU 22)

*(Sing this hymn contemplatively, with harmony, as many times as needed for the envelopes to be hung on the tree.)*

## The Response

**Ministry of Music:** (Junior or Senior Choir)

### Minute for Mission

*(“Advent Joy,” the Minute for Dec. 16, 2007, focuses on children, especially children in Africa where our Mission and Service Fund gifts support the work of Karen and Bill Butt, United Church overseas personnel serving with the Christian Council of Mozambique.)*

### Offering Invitation

Dear friends, there is an urgency in the air today. All earth is waiting to see the Promised One. When asked if he is the one to come, Jesus answered, “Go and tell...what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.” And so it is left to us to give generously to continue those ministries of Jesus so that we might help make the world ready for the coming kingdom, a kingdom of light, righteousness, and justice. With expectant hearts let us bring forth our tithes and offering for God’s work in this community and around the world through the Mission and Service Fund.

### Offertory Hymn: “Grant Us, God, the Grace” (VU 540)

*(Children bring the wagons of pink-wrapped gifts forward, with the ushers bringing forth the gifts of money. They may need to stop along the way to pick up gifts from people in the pews. This may require an announcement with the offering invitation.)*

### Offertory Prayer

Gracious and loving God, accept these gifts as our attempt to walk in your light. Bless them so that they may be used for the urgent concerns of our world, to bring light where there is darkness, to build peace between neighbours, and to help us all live honourably with one another. May this offering ready us to receive Christ in a new face in our midst and to boldly wear pink as your people of welcome! Amen.

### Pastoral Prayer

#### The Lord’s Prayer

**Hymn:** “All Earth Is Waiting” (VU 5)

### Sending Forth

**One:** Go forth remembering who you are and to whom you belong.

### Blessing (sung in unison)

I’ve got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus, down in my heart.  
Where? Down in my heart! Where? Down in my heart!  
I’ve got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus, down in my heart.  
Where? Down in my heart to stay.

**Choral Amen:** VU 969

### Postlude

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**Bulletin Announcements**

You are invited to place your “pink” gift for the women and children at (*name a community ministry that supports women and children*) in the wagons at the doors to the sanctuary. Or, you place them at the end of your pew to be gathered by the children during the offering. To learn more about the important work of (*name of community ministry that supports women*) see (*website address of the organization*). Some Mission and Service Fund mission support grants also support community organizations working with women.

Envelopes in the bulletin (*or in the pew*) are available for a monetary gift in lieu of—or in addition to—a pink gift. You may join the children at the end of the drama, placing your envelopes on the tree. Or, you may place them in the offering plate. Cheques should be made out to: \_\_\_\_\_.

Please join us for fair-trade coffee and community-building in (*name of room*) after the service.