

The M&S Fund: A United Fund for a United Vision

by Bill Steadman, General Council Office, The United Church of Canada

This White Gift service highlights the work of The United Church of Canada's Mission and Service Fund. Many resources are available to use as bulletin inserts or as congregational display material to supplement the storytelling in this service. Resources may be ordered through United Church Resource Distribution.

For a complete listing, visit www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/support/resources.

This service may be used at any time during Advent-Christmas, but the scriptures are from Advent 2 and Advent 3 (December 6 and 13), as many congregations have their White Gift service on one of those occasions. Some churches have a special dramatic presentation on Christmas Eve and this service, with different hymns and readings, could be adapted for that.

All elements of the service may be copied into the bulletin, or multiple copies of the drama script may be made for use within the United Church, except for the hymns covered by copyright (unless you have a licence for reproduction on a screen or in a pamphlet).

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Worship Service

Prelude Music

Call to Worship

One: God calls us, and we respond.

All: **We respond with our prayers and our hopes,
We respond with our gifts and our skills,
We respond with our commitment and our faith.**

One: Christ leads us and we follow.

All: **We follow the one who brought healing and hope,
We follow the one who taught tolerance and love,
We follow the one who shared insight and understanding.**

One: The Spirit blows where it will, and we are touched.

All: **We are touched by the groaning of the earth and its people,
We are touched by the needs of our sisters and brothers,
We are touched by the excitement of our partners and worshipping
communities.**

One: God speaks to us a word of truth, and we listen.

All: **We listen for the heartbeat of the holy. We reach out with a generous heart for the good of all.**

Hymn (*See suggestions on pages 5–7.*)

Prayer of Approach

(Read by worship leader or in unison, as you determine.)

You are with us, God, wherever we go. Help us to see the needs of those around us, the pains of those among us, the joys of those who inspire us, and the hopes of those who lead us. May we not move forward in fear, but walk in the light of Christ along a pathway of service and outreach. Be near us, God, so that we may have the courage to do what is right in your presence, we pray. Amen.

Children's Time

(A story can be read from M&S for Kids or Hand in Hand: M&S for Kids, vol. 2. If your church doesn't have a copy, these resources are available from UCRD. The leader may engage the children in a discussion of what it means to care for another person, asking the children how they show people that they care. Possible answers: be kind, be helpful, listen, accept people who are different from us. The drama may take the place of both the children's time and sermon, or of the message.)

Children's Hymn (*See suggestions on pages 5 and 7.*)

Scripture Readings

Advent 2

Malachi 3: 1–4

Luke 1: 68–79

Philippians 1: 3–11

Luke 3: 1–6

Advent 3

Zephaniah 3: 14–20

Isaiah 12: 2–6

Philippians 4: 4–7

Luke 3: 7–18

Hymn (*See suggestions on pages 5–7.*)

White Gift Drama: "Lonely, but Not Alone"

(See page 7. The setup for the drama can be done while the hymn is sung.)

Hymns for the Drama

"I Am a Child of God" (*More Voices* 157)

"Where There Is Hope" (Tune: *Voices United* 606, McKee. Words: Bill Steadman; see drama script)

Offering Invitation

(An alternative invitation is at end of the play, to be offered by the narrator as part of the drama, if you wish.)

We have heard stories of the ways that we live God's mission in the world. We give thanks for those who serve through the mission and service of The United Church of Canada. We give thanks for those whose gifts and support are an inspiration. Now we are invited to share in this witness and this work as we present our gifts to the ministry of this congregation and to the mission of God, which we live out through the Mission and Service Fund. Our offerings will be received at this time.

Offertory Music

Offering Prayer 1

We offer to you, O God, these gifts as we seek to fulfill your purpose on earth. May they be used to further your mission, and to carry forward our service to others. Bless these gifts and guide all that we do in our community, in our country, and around the world in Christ's name. Amen.

Offering Prayer 2

Holy One, you are the example of generosity. You provide for us with abundance, and you urge us to care for all that you have made. Help us to celebrate your goodness as we share these gifts for the support of others in our community and around the world. May we seek to live the example of Christ in all that we do, this day and always. Amen.

Prayers of the People

(This is an excellent opportunity to offer prayers for: those from your Conference who are serving with our global partners; those from your congregation or community who are involved with specialized ministries; those who have gone into ministry vocations or who are active within church life in other communities; and those who carry out the programs and ministries of your congregation. What is offered here could be a framework for such prayers, or you might want to create your own. Often those involved with the drama have a deep sense of what they want to say as a response to the experience of "living" a certain

character, and may be very helpful in creating the prayer as a response to their experience.)

One: We gather as a people of faith, open to the inspiration of Jesus, encouraged by the witness of God's people everywhere, ready to respond where needs are identified in any part of the world.

We remember Jesus, born in a manger, a simple beginning for one who taught us the power of servant leadership. May we also lead by example, caring for one another and reaching out with love in our own community and around the world.

All: Help us, God, to be a people generous in spirit.

One: We pray for the well-being of those who face many challenges—poverty, disease, malnutrition, abandonment, despair. We know, God, that even in the most difficult challenges of life, people are able to find reason for hope. Help us to be agents of your love, and may we witness to your care and concern for each one of us.

All: Help us, God, to be a people generous in faith.

One: We lift up those who have many gifts to share— the loving grandmother caring for her grandchildren whose parents have died due to HIV/AIDS; the loving teenage mother seeking a home for herself and her child, and a new beginning on the journey of life; the loving health-care worker struggling with a lack of funding and numerous demands on her to be a healing presence every day. Help us, God, to be there, alongside those who serve and nurture.

All: Help us, God, to be a people generous in service.

One: Jesus taught us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Equip us, God, to see the face of our neighbour in everyone we meet. Instill in us the value of seeking to make a difference in all that we do, say, think, and feel. Teach us to be generous in our gifts and tithes as well as in our hopes and dreams and spirit.

All: Help us, God, to be a people generous in sharing all that we have and are.

One: We pray all of this in response to the one who taught us the reality of God's generous spirit—a spirit that is present to strengthen us all as we pray together: Our father, who art in heaven...

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn (*See suggestions below.*)

Benediction

"May God's Sheltering Wings" (MV 214)

"Go Now in Peace, Guided by the Light" (MV 211)

Suggested Hymns

Hymns for Advent White Gift Service

Hymn 1: "Arise, Your Light Is Come" (VU 79)

Hymn 2: "There's a Voice in the Wilderness" (VU 18)

Hymn 3: "Deep in Our Hearts" (MV 154)

For Children: "We Are Marching" (in the sense of seeking to follow God in all we do; VU 646) or "I Am Walking a Path of Peace" (MV 221)

Hymn 4: "Come to This Place" (Tune: VU 7, Moon Beams; line 1 follows metre of verse 2 in *Voices United*; could sing verses intertwined with drama scenes instead of "I Am a Child of God," *More Voices* 157. Words: Bill Steadman)

Come to This Place

1.

Come to this place filled with memories and cheer
Come, be encouraged by folk who are here.

REFRAIN

For God shall be with us in all we do,
In worship and praise, and in Christ's mission, too,
So hope is shared each day.

2.

Find ways to live love and open your heart,
Find, in this gath'ring, a buoyant new start.

REFRAIN

3.

Seek health and wholeness, Christ's promise is clear,
Seek life's abundance and serve without fear.

REFRAIN

4.

Go from this place, share the truth you have learned,
Go, be among those whom others have spurned.

REFRAIN

Hymns for Christmas Eve Drama/Communion

Hymn 1: "Celebrate the Coming of the Promised One" (Tune: VU 299, McNaught. Words: Bill Steadman)

Celebrate the Coming of the Promised One

1.
Christmas trees rest laden; manger scenes reveal,
'tis the time to show God's love is real.

REFRAIN

Celebrate the coming of the promised one,
Share with joy and laughter, everyone.

2.
Friends and loved ones gather, choristers display,
Hope and peace surround us on this day.

REFRAIN

3.
Bread is blessed and broken; cup is filled and raised,
Signs of liberation—God be praised.

REFRAIN

4.
In this holy setting, we behold a light,
May the angels' words ring true tonight.

REFRAIN

5.
Carry out God's mission wherever you are,
Bear the light of Christ both near and far.

REFRAIN

Hymn 2: Behold a Light Shall Shine
(Tune: VU 715, St. Thomas 6686. Words: Bill Steadman)

Behold a Light Shall Shine

Behold a light shall shine,
just as it did before,
a light to share with us the dream
of peace forevermore.

Behold a light shall shine,
a sign of joy for all,
may it reveal a future clear
for all who hear God's call.

Behold a light shall shine,
through gifts that we now share,
God sends us forth, preparing us
to serve, to help, to care.

Behold a light shall shine
to guide us on this day.
Illuminate, O God, our paths,
disclose to us Christ's way.

Behold a light shall shine,
despair shall be no more,
our mission is to show Christ's love,
so hope may be restored.

For Children: "I Am the Light of the World" (VU 87)

White Gift Drama: Lonely, but Not Alone

The following series of vignettes illustrates some of the ways we assist people in Canada and, with our global partners, around the world. The focus of these stories is how women carry many of the burdens caused by natural disasters, economic downturn, and social upheaval.

Each story is introduced by a narrator. The narrator may speak from the podium at the front or from a lectern at the side. If you have the capacity, the narrator might speak over the speaker system, invisible, as if the voice of God were communicating to the whole congregation.

Those taking part are encouraged to learn their lines, but there are techniques to get around memorizing if there isn't time. The grandmother, for example, could have the script placed on the cot, hidden from view. The mother holding her "child" wrapped in blankets could have the script tucked into the folds of the blanket. The woman sweeping could have a script on the "ground" (floor) hidden by a prop.

A copy of the *Mandate Mission and Service Fund Special Edition 2009–2010* could be available for everyone as they leave, or information on the Mission and Service Fund could be inserted in the bulletin. Resources may be ordered at www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/support/resources.

Scene One, Zambia: Grandmother dressed in simple clothes standing in front of a circle of children playing behind her

(Small child on a cot, covered by a plain blanket. A brother or sister kneels next to the cot as the grandmother brushes flies off the child, who is ill with a fever. The grandmother is the primary caregiver; her voice should express her pain and heartache.)

Narrator: HIV/AIDS is experienced in all parts of the world, including Canada. In Africa, a whole generation has been decimated by this terrible disease. In many communities grandmothers are raising their grandchildren, in some cases from a very young age. The well-being of these children is often compromised due to lack of access to schooling and basics like clean water and adequate food. We work with partners in such challenging situations.

Grandmother: What will happen when I die? Many mornings I wake up and ask this question. I am an HIV positive grandmother. I don't know how to read or write, but what I have lived has moved me to act. I have cared for six of my grandchildren ever since their parents died. Until recently they have only had me to look after them. I too contracted HIV while caring for my eldest son while he was dying.

A Zambian women's organization offered women in my village courses on HIV/AIDS, the roles of women and men, and what rights we had. Because I had never gone to school, the courses were a powerful experience for me. I began to speak at the village tribal council meetings, urging our village to organize to better care for the orphans. I was concerned about their future. With the support of the women's organization, we began to send more orphans to school and make sure all orphans are better cared for in our village. While the future is not secure for my grandchildren, I now worry less. They are getting schooling, and the village will care for them after I am gone.

I understand that people in Canada have supported our efforts. Thank you for remembering the women and children of Zambia. I remember you in my prayers and wonder how people halfway around the world can care about me. I also pray for the women and children in your communities. I pray that they live healthy, happy, and long lives

Narrator: The United Church of Canada works with partners in Africa and all over the world to assist individuals and communities devastated by the scourge of AIDS. We help ensure that more people living with HIV/AIDS have access to medicines, that they are better cared for, that HIV/AIDS orphans go to school, that people protect themselves from getting HIV/AIDS, and that churches are a force to end discrimination against those living with AIDS. The Beads of Hope campaign that augmented the efforts of the Mission and Service Fund in this work ended a couple of years ago, but the work that we do continues, thanks to your regular and ongoing contributions to the Mission and Service Fund.

(Hymn: "I Am a Child of God," verse 1, More Voices 157; or "Where There Is Hope," verse 1. Tune: Voices United 606, McKee. Words: Bill Steadman)

Where There Is Hope, verse 1

Where there is hope, the spotlight shines,
On what we'll say and do,
For we must strive to seek full life,
For those with struggles new.

Scene Two: Young Mother starts new life with her child at the Massey Centre for Women

(Chair and crib. The busy look of a room where there's a child—a few toys strewn around. Remember: a single, teenage mom could not afford many toys. There might be some school books and notepaper handy, or maybe a computer, as Young Mother is juggling motherhood and her education. She holds her baby wrapped in a blanket.)

Narrator: The United Church of Canada has been in partnership with the Massey Centre for Women over many years. The United Church contributes people who serve as volunteers, as members of the Board, and as fundraisers. We give other gifts when we hear about the ministry and learn about the support it has received from the Mission and Service Fund over several decades. Many women active in the United Church have supported young women in their journey through the Centre. Several United Church members' mothers went to the Massey Centre for Women as pregnant teenagers, in order to have their children in a place where they would receive support and care.

Young Mother: There was no question I would have this child. I may be only a teenager, but I did turn 18 a week before my baby was born. That makes me an adult, doesn't it? I can look after this child. I know it. It seemed so easy when I was in the early stages of my pregnancy. Unlike some of the women here, I did not have any sickness in the early months. Life seemed great.

Now that Angie is here, however, I see life differently. She demands so much attention. She expects to be fed as soon as she wakes up, no matter what I am doing. Going to school and being a mother is really hard work but I plan to make it. The social workers and teachers here at Massey Centre help me gain the skills and the strength to do it. They know how hard it is. When I am ready to give up, someone arrives just at the right time. They really listen to what I am going through and what I am thinking. I am thankful for the support Massey gives me. I hate to admit it, but right now I really need this place.

(Hymn: "I Am a Child of God," verse 2, More Voices 157; or "Where There Is Hope," verse 2. Tune: Voices United 606, McKee. Words: Bill Steadman)

Where There Is Hope, verse 2

A woman learns her life has changed,
No chance to party wild.
Her purpose has become quite clear,
To love this precious child.

Scene Three: A Woman sweeping at clouds of dust, trying to keep her modest home clean

(The scene is barren, for the fields around her lack any vegetation after a year of drought.)

If you want to expand the cast, others could be in the background moving around slowly, looking for anything to pick and eat, but finding nothing.)

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Narrator: The Mission and Service Fund is our way to partner with organizations like the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. We, along with 15 other organizations and denominations, seek to make a difference at times of famine, flood, and earthquake. Projects include training in appropriate agricultural techniques to avoid crises by increasing knowledge and supporting sustainable agricultural practices. Sometimes this includes reclaiming traditional techniques.

Woman: This seems impossible—no rain, no more seeds, no crops. We never used to have drought like this. What has happened? What has changed in our world that this is now the case? For now, we have help with food. We get just enough food to keep us going. It comes in bags marked CFGB. Someone told me that stands for Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Is that true? Why would Canadians think about me, in Kenya, and my family? How would they even know about us and our drought?

But I don't want to get food all the time. In the past, my land provided me with what I needed for myself and my family. Through CFGB we have also heard about something called "conservation farming" that has helped thousands of farmers in Zimbabwe avoid hunger. CFGB and the United Church working together could support our efforts to develop conservation farming, or we could receive support from CFGB to develop better irrigation methods. Farming is our way of life. Next year, I don't want to face the threat of hunger again. Thank you for your support.

Narrator: Your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund allow us to partner with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. We are represented on the board of the Foodgrains Bank, and thanks to our growing projects and partnership activities the United Church immediately sent \$200,000 in relief food through the Foodgrains Bank when we learned of the devastating famine in Kenya earlier this fall. Through the Foodgrains Bank help will be given to Kenyans so they can re-establish the ability to grow their own food. Your gifts to M&S do make a difference.

(Hymn: "I Am a Child of God," verse 3, More Voices 157; or "Where There Is Hope," verse 3. Tune: Voices United 606, McKee. Words: Bill Steadman)

Where There Is Hope, verse 3

When grain dries up and food is gone,
The hungry cry in need,
The love of Christ enables us
To start to plant new seeds.

Scene Four: Mary

(Mary might be pictured as a strong woman in the front of the sanctuary, or if you want to maintain a traditional tableau, she could be in a manger scene with Joseph, but Mary should be clearly the strong presence in the setting, and should rise—with or without child in arms—to deliver her speech. If the baby remains in a manger, then Mary should refer to the child often by gestures and nodding.)

Narrator: We need to listen to the story of Mary once again—yes, that Mary, the mother of Jesus. She gave birth in very trying circumstances. Life was not easy for her. Her gift was more than the birth of a child. It was the releasing of a child called to be someone special in God's plan. Mary was generous in heart, mind, and spirit throughout her life. Let us hear what she might have said had her words been recorded when her own child was born.

Mary: Is this what being a mother is all about? In the cold, hidden from view, sleeping on straw? I know this child is special. I am sure of it. Some laugh when I say that God has assured me that my child will grow up to make a difference in the world. Why should they dismiss me—does not every mother think (yes, know) that her child is special in God's eyes?

I want a world where more people see their role as being to help one another and make this world a better place. If this little boy can live that message, I will be a blessed mother. All this hardship will have been worth it. In fact, knowing God cares for me and my son means what I am facing now is not so difficult.

Narrator: Our faith opens for us new awareness. The ways we seek to live God's mission take us to places of pain and hardship, opportunity and new life. The Christian story began when a young woman faced uncertainty; yet her gift of a child blessed by God was the origin of the story of our faith.

Today we can write new stories of hope, peace, faith, and love as we share in God's mission in Canada and around the world through the Mission and Service Fund.

(Hymn: "I Am a Child of God," verses 4 and 5, More Voices 157; or "Where There Is Hope," verses 4 and 5. Tune: Voices United 606, McKee. Words: Bill Steadman)

Where There Is Hope, verses 4, 5

A child is born, new life is given,
To Mary, who will share,
Her son with all, the chosen one,
To show to all God cares.

Now we go forth into the world,
For God's bright light is near.
We go, each day, with newfound joy,
Dispelling others' fear.

Narrator: We seek to make a difference in the world through our Christian commitment. Your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund allow us to live the Christian story as we share in God's mission here and around the world.

Alternative Offering Invitation

Our offering will now be received to support the work of God through our gifts to this faith community, and to support our wider community throughout Canada and with our global partners by sharing through the Mission and Service Fund.