



# Worshipping Faithfully in the Empire World

by Betty Lynn Schwab

The following service is written for a congregation's regular Sunday worship. Sections marked \* are suitable for a small group devotional or study group opening. The service follows the liturgical movement of the report "Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire": witness, confession, call, and commitment. It assumes much of this is new for the worshippers. Hopefully the service comes after a board or outreach committee meeting has looked at some of the issues involved and decided on at least one step of a course of action to be taken by the congregation (for example, to study further the ideas of empire, to support a local social justice group, to practise looking at the world through "empire lenses" in worship generally speaking and in meetings and small group ministries). This will be announced to the congregation as the "recommendation and action" in this service.

Worship volunteers will need to photocopy the enmeshed globe (page 31) to distribute to worshippers as they enter, and the dove (page 31) to give worshippers as they depart.

## Witness: Understanding Empire

### \*Call to Worship God

One: Purple mountains, deep blue oceans,  
red cardinals chirping and big happy sunflowers—

**All: Ours is a wonder-filled creation!**

One: Safe food, clean water, good clothing,  
doctors, freedoms, education—

**All: Ours is a wonderful world!**

One: Time for tropical cruises and annual vacations,  
love of friends and family,  
warmth of church and beautiful retirement condos—

**All: Ours is a meaning-filled life.**

One: So come let us worship God,  
who created the earth  
for our enjoyment and daily living!

### \*Hymn of Praise

From *Voices United*: "O God beyond All Praising," #256;  
"God Who Gives to Life Its Goodness," #260; "O God Who  
Shaped Creation," #276

From *More Voices*: "Creator God You Gave Us Life," #27;  
"Mother Earth, Our Mother Birthing," #39; "Shadow and  
Substance," #44; "Hope of Abraham and Sarah," #148

### \*Opening Prayer (in unison)

**Creator of all,  
there is so much beauty and joy in your creation!**

**Yet it is marred**

**by the need for food banks and clothing depots,  
by greed and our fear of other people,  
by terrorism, child abuse, and the sex trade.**

**Things are not as you once saw they were: "good."**

**Be with us now,**

**that we may see with your eye,  
and deepen our desire for your goodness to be restored,  
so may we worship you today. Amen.**

### Children's Time

*The topic is global bullies. Share a brief example of bullying and invite the children to share a story of bullying. Ponder together why children bully. Ask whether they think only kids bully. Draw out the idea that countries can bully each other and that makes the world a sad place. Can you and I bully nature? What would Jesus like to see us do? We can't stop war but we can stop ourselves from hurting others and creation. Each time we do that, love grows a little more and makes the world a happier place for all.*

### \*A Litany of Witnesses

*See page 31.*

## Confession: Seeing Our Part of Empire

### Reflection

Honest witnessing to ourselves, to one another, and to God is the power of confession out of which comes new life.

I invite you to take a moment in silence to list some of the ways we contribute to oppression, ecological problems, poverty, and racism on the back of the enmeshed globe given to you as you entered.

*A moment of silence*

### Community Confession

*As the organ begins to play a well known Lenten hymn (e.g., "Just as I Am," "Beneath the Cross of Jesus") invite the people to process forward and place their globes in a bowl at the front of the sanctuary. A chant such as Kyrie or "Because You Came" #64, More Voices, or "If I Have Been*

*the Source of Pain,” #76, More Voices, may be sung as the last people return to the pews.*

### Prayer for Assurance

Holy Creator, all is not our fault;  
yet each of us has a part in the healing.  
In your love, forgive us.  
We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

### Response to the Assurance

*“Be Still and Know,” More Voices #77, sung repeatedly (or similar chant)*

*As the hymn is sung, slowly process the bowl of globes out of the sanctuary and process in the two bowls of doves, setting them in the same place as the first bowl.*

## Call: Caesar Commands; God Calls

### Scripture Readings

Use any combination of the following (or other texts):

Ecclesiastes 2:1–15

Psalm 1 (*Voices United* #724), 5 (*Voices United* #728), 37 (*Voices United* #763), 42–43 (*Voices United* #768), or 137 (*Voices United* #858)

Matthew 25:31–39

Luke 12:54–59

John 3:1–8

### Hymn of Faith

From *Voices United*: “Awake, O Sleeper,” #566; “The Servant Song,” #595; “When Pain of the World,” #598; “When I Needed a Neighbour,” #600

From *More Voices*: “God Weeps,” #78; “Spirit, Open My Heart,” #79; “A Voice Was Heard in Ramah,” #111; “We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky,” #143

### Sermon

Drawing on a metaphor, phrase, or idea in the scripture readings chosen, on The United Church of Canada’s document “Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire” ([www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca)), and on this edition of *Mandate*, enable the congregation to reflect on the concept of empire and our part in its healing (i.e., how community overcomes empire, in large and small ways).

### Prayer for Grace

Read alone or sing together “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace,” *Voices United*, #684.

## Commitment: Whom Will We Serve?

### Recommendation and Action

*The chair of the board or outreach committee comes forward and shares with the congregation a summary of the discussion held and the decision for action he or she now invites the congregation to begin. (See note at beginning of the outline.)*

### \*Prayers of the People

See page 31.

*Our Lord’s Prayer*

### Hymn of Departure

From *Voices United*: “To Abraham and Sarah,” #634; “Faith, While Trees Are Still in Blossom,” #643; “To Us All, to Every Nation,” #694; “O for a World,” #697; “Live into Hope,” #699

From *More Voices*: “Spirit God, Be Our Breath,” #150; “Deep in Our Hearts,” #154; “When Hands Reach Out Beyond Divides,” #169; “Christ Has No Body Now but Yours,” #171

*As this hymn is sung the ushers distribute the doves from bowls resembling the confession bowl. (See note at the beginning of the outline.)*

### Commissioning

One: As God’s people, will we stick our heads in the sand and hope empire will go away?

**All: No!**

One: As God’s people, will we anesthetise ourselves, accepting only happy thoughts, upbeat belief?

**All: No!**

One: As God’s people, do we abandon faith, and only take care of number one?

**All: No!**

One: As God’s people, do we cave into despair and limp fearfully through life?

**All: No!**

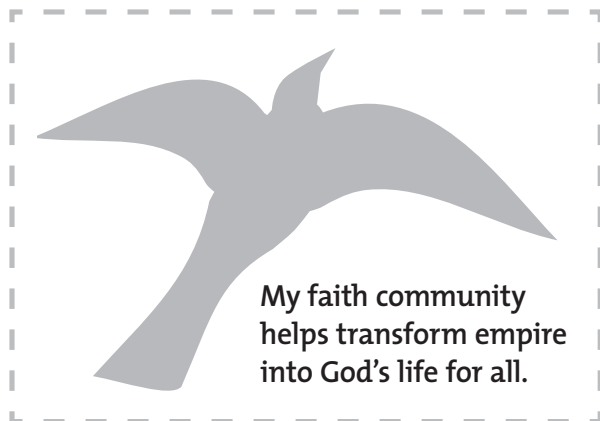
One: Christ sends us forth into the world as his very body, to love and serve, to seek justice and resist evil.

**All: Strengthened by God, we go forth!**

**Community overcomes empire every time.**

**We will build Christ’s community everywhere!**

—The Rev. Dr. Betty Lynn Schwab is the General Council Worship and Liturgy Coordinator.



## A Litany of Witnesses

- Voice 1: In Jesus' day, beggars called out in the streets,  
heavy taxes were paid to Rome,  
old age without a family meant death.
- Voice 2: In our times, the homeless sleep on city streets,  
debt cripples entire nations,  
farmers harvest cash crops, instead of food for  
their family.
- Voice 1: In Jesus' day, there were wars and rumours of war,  
Rome controlled everyone's daily life,  
Israel's king was corrupt, abusive of even his  
own family.
- Voice 2: In our times, military power absorbs a large  
part of a nation's budget,  
justice often favours the influential,  
racism and sexism determine who's first, who  
gets the most.
- Voice 1: In Jesus' day, wild animals were rounded up for  
Rome's cruel circuses,  
local hills were deforested for distant palaces,  
people died of lead poisoning from their cups  
and cooking pots.
- Voice 2: In our times, pollution fills our air and oceans,  
plants and animals disappear forever,  
poor people say our talk of ecology is a  
smokescreen to safeguard our wealth.
- Voice 1: Yet Jesus proclaimed abundant living  
and talked of people blessed even in grief.  
We can do no less as his body today.
- Voice 2: How we shape our lifestyle shapes the lifestyle  
of the world.  
How the world is changed changes our lifestyle.
- Voices 1 and 2: (*loudly*) Are we helpless? Has God  
abandoned us?  
Is there anything we can do? (*silence*)
- Voice 1: As with Jesus, so with us:  
honest witnessing must be our first step.
- Voice 2: Thanks be to God!

## Prayers of the People

- Creator of all,  
We are privileged and grateful for our many blessings,  
economic, political, geographical, and social.  
Thank you, holy Creator.  
May we be more aware this week of those who are not  
privileged:  
men and women dying of poverty and malnutrition,  
children in pain with no health care,  
elderly making it through another day of  
bombs, neglect, and oppression.
- All: May we be a community faithful to you, you alone.**
- Creator of all,  
We remember before you all who abuse power:  
politicians and corporation tycoons,  
refugee camp administrators who bully and frighten,  
corrupt judges and penal systems.  
May we let our thirst for your justice deepen  
until we work fully as community  
calling to account each wrongful use of power.
- All: May we be a community faithful to you, you alone.**
- Creator of all,  
We know the earth groans under our heavy step.  
Our bottled water lowers the water table of the distant  
farmer.  
The desire for money means elephants are killed only for  
their tusks  
and bears are ripped open for their gallbladders.  
The long arm of the oil industry provides us with polluting cars  
and polyester products everywhere.  
May we let ourselves be sensitive enough to ensure our step  
upon the earth is life-giving.
- All: May we be a community faithful to you, you alone.**
- Creator of all,  
Listen as we speak with you in silence for the people, places,  
and situations that concern us and need your embrace.....
- All: May we be a community faithful to you, you alone.**