# The International Decade for People of African Descent

# A Service of Word and Sacrament

## Welcome and Introduction

The General Assembly (GA) of the United Nations has declared 2015–2024 to be [the International Decade for People of African Descent](http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/). In proclaiming this Decade, the international community is recognizing “that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected.” As people of faith, we know every part of humanity is a reflection, an embodied wisdom and the power of God, and yet all of our collective humanity has been diminished and ruptured through the enslavement of African peoples and the colonization and exploitation of those same peoples land. Chinua Achebe shares the African proverb that states, “Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It is important for people of African descent to tell their/our own truths, stories and histories. It is important for all of us to protect and preserve, to celebrate and enjoy the wisdom and beauty of God in our siblings of African descent, and by doing so, know God and ourselves in a deeper way. Ashe.

For more information on how the United Church of Christ and The United Church of Canada are engaging in the decade watch: <https://youtu.be/hFkQdEQ1BxA>

To learn more about the urgent need for a UN decade watch: <https://youtu.be/85lWC1UFUv8>

## Acknowledgment of Traditional Territory

<http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/acknowledging-the-territory.pdf>

CALL TO WORSHIP*adapted from Psalm 46*

God is our refuge and home.

God is our strength and center.

**God is a very present help.**

**God has always been and always will be, our very present help.**

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth has changed; though the world has changed; though our lives have been shaped by history out of our control and by present realities that threaten us.

**There is a river whose streams make glad, the diaspora of God. God is in her midst. They shall not be moved. God will be present to help wherever morning dawns.**

SONG**: Funga Alafia Ashe Ashe (We Come To Greet You, Ashe Ashe)**

*West African Greeting Song in Yoruba*

<https://youtu.be/bZFbbo0ezJg>

***Alafia****: A greeting, like hello with the meaning of “good health” or “peace” (like “shalom”). Alafia is a type of traditional welcome dance.* ***Fanga****: A traditional welcome dance. It’s often misspelled as “funga.”* ***Ashe****: (Pronounced “ah-shay”) The Yoruba believe “ashe” is a basic force emanating from the Creator that unites all living and non-living things. Some translate it as “amen” (although that word has more western connotations).*

***Funga Alafia, Ashe, Ashe (4x)***

***With my thoughts I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe***

***With my words I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe***

***With my heart I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe***

***This welcome is the heart of God, Ashe, Ashe***

***Funga Alafia, Ashe, Ashe (4x)***

## LEARNING TOGETHER

Research and share with the congregation some local Black History. Is there a historic site in your neighborhood? What was happening in your church around the time of the Civil Rights Movement? The Abolition Movement? Is there someone who can give a first person account of Black History in your community? Dig deep.

*or*

Teach the congregation a new song of change and resistance. Some songs that are easy to teach and in the creative commons are here: <https://art.poorpeoplescampaign.org/portfolio/getting-into-step/>. Or invite a local musician or member of the community to teach a song from the African Diaspora and to provide a little context for why the song is important to them, or how they have used it to bring about change or to resist evil.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (based on A Song of Faith) *Dr. Alydia Smith*

Today in our worship,

we recognize people of African Descent and lament anti-Black racism and violence.

We pray that the Spirit will reorient us:

**challenging us to live by grace rather than entitlement;**

**expecting us to be a blessing to the earth.**

We pray that by acknowledging our brokenness, we will be closer to becoming a church where the good news is lived out:

**faith nurtured and hearts comforted,**

**gifts shared for the good of all,**

**resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,**

**fierce love in the face of violence,**

**human dignity defended,**

**members of a community held and inspired by God.**

Through our tears and silent confessions, may we witness to your love and grace.

*[time of silence]*

## RESPONSE/ASSURANCE OF GRACE:

God is our refuge and home.

God is our strength and center.

**God is a very present help.**

**God has always been and always will be, our very present help.**

## HYMN:

*Voices United (VU) 412/ NCH 84 This is the Day*

*More Voices (MV) 97 Listen God is Calling*

*SING! Prayer and Praise (SING!) 83 What a Mighty God we Serve*

## SCRIPTURE:

*(readings for the 4th Sunday after Epiphany or choose other readings as appropriate. You could read from Zephaniah 3:10, 12-14. Zephaniah was of African Descent, he is the son of Cushi and a contemporary of Jeremiah)*

Jeremiah 1:4:10

Psalm 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

## REFLECTION:

Consider having different people share ways that they have grown in their understanding and knowledge of people of African Descent and how that has affected their ability to love others as Paul commands. For people of African Descent, you may invite them to share personal learnings and how it has helped them to better love themselves and others. For people of non-African Descent they could reflect on times when they have been racist, or failed to love as Paul commands, and how that experience has transformed them.

Other questions for reflection could include:

What do you know about the history and legacy of slavery in your community?

What myths about racism in Canada and slavery are debunked for you? How? What harm might these myths have caused? Who did these myths benefit, how and why?

How has the church benefitted from the enslavement of people?

You could also share poetry from people of African Descent along with personal testimonies that reflect on how loving each other forces us to share in each other’s struggles and recognize our own ignorance, bias and/or oppression.

Possible poems to share could include:

* **Barely Breathing** *by Karen Georgia Thompson and Keon Heywood*https://youtu.be/0As6JlZYM1Q
* **A Brave and Startling Truth** *by Maya Angelou*<http://webtv.un.org/watch/united-nations-honours-maya-angelou/5240753944001>
* **I Can’t Take Care of my Family This Way** a music video from the Poor Peoples Campaign  
  <https://art.poorpeoplescampaign.org/portfolio/cant-take-care-family-way/>

## RESPONSE:

God is our refuge and home.

God is our strength and center.

**God is a very present help.**

**God has always been and always will be, our very present help.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**: Kumbayah**

***Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;  
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;  
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya,  
O Lord, kum bay ya.***

***Someone need you, Lord, come by here  
Someone need you, Lord, come by here  
Someone need you, Lord, come by here  
Oh, Lord, come by here.***

***Now I need you, Lord, come by here  
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here  
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here  
Oh, Lord, come by here.***

***We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya;  
We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya;  
We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya,  
O Lord, kum bay ya.***

*[continue music during the spoken prayer, allowing amble space for intercessions]*

Loving Lord, come by us, we pray.

Come to:

The joyful …

The excited …

The grateful …

The scared …

The sad …

The weary …

The grieving …

The distraught …

The broken …

Come to us all we pray.

***Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;  
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;  
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya,  
O Lord, kum bay ya.***

## PRESENTATION OF OFFERING

## MINISTRY OF MUSIC

Consider ordering a copy of We Are by Y.M. Barnwell, visit her website for an audio recording of an SATBB arrangement: <https://www.ymbarnwell.com/songs/>

SHARING OF THE PEACE*by Rev. Dr. Velda Love*

*Voice of the Diaspora:*

Who are my people?

What manner of soil gave birth to my ancestors?

When I go and search for their origins and first beginnings, will the soil receive me, welcome me, and teach me who I am?

What nation, tribe, clan, family line do I belong?

I imagine those who come with the same inquiries will fill the continent searching, seeking, asking and wanting to know … who are my people?

Which of the 3,000 distinct ethnic groups do I belong? Which of the 2,000 plus languages do I possess in my DNA? Who are my people?

Am I Dinka, Fang, or Fulani? Am I Watutsi, Zulu or Igbo? Do I descend from the Hausa, Jukun, Kassena, Kongo, Lemba, or Nande? Perhaps my ancestors are Wolof, Xhosa, Tsongo, or Zulu. I look into my eyes and think these are Ashanti, Ewe, or Maroon eyes.

I do not yet know. But I am confident my ancestors and their DNA reside on every country on every continent on this planet. My siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and extended family are Afro-Brazilian, Afro-British, Afro-Indian, Afro-Asian, Afro-Canadian, Afro-Mexican, Afro-Barbadian, maybe Afro-Irish, Afro-French, and Afro-Arab. For it is from the African soil that the Cradle of Civilization rose.

Oh, what a day that will be when we gather for the family reunion. There will be every conceivable shade of luscious brown, black, cocoa, and mocha ready to embrace, looking for a hug, smiling and greeting with welcome home. No one will be asking, “are you my people? We will be certain we are family and we are the people we’ve been waiting for. Ashe

The Peace of Christ be with you

**And also with you**

Let us greet one another now with signs of the peace of Christ and prepare for our invitation to the table …

## OFFERATORY HYMN

*Welcome Table: A Mass of Spirituals is communion setting based on familiar African American Spirituals that could be song by a choir or the congregation:* <https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/welcome-table-a-mass-of-spirituals-print-g8225>

*VU 383 Wa wa wa Emimimo*

*VU 469/ NCH 347 Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ*

*VU 480/NCH 330 Let Us Break Bread Together*

*SING! 184 I Need You to Survive*

*SING! 8 Come to the Banquet*

*SING! 185 The Jesus in Me*

HOLY COMMUNION *by Rev. Tracy Howe Wispelwey*

### Invitation:

This is the table of our Lord, a fellowship that endures history and the trials of our past, present and future with an invitation that rings out through communities and creation, calling you to come as you are. Come because you are beloved and invited, whether you know it or not, feel it or not. Come and be fed; come and find healing; come and be renewed for the journey ahead. Come and know that the Lord invites sinner and saint, oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, Indigenous and displaced, the corporate CEO and the migrant farmer, the bold and courageous and, the fearful and complacent, for we are one humanity, all children of our Creator, all in need of forgiveness and bread.

The Lord be with you.  
**And also with you.**Lift up your hearts.  
**We lift them to the Lord.**Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

### Prayer of Great Thanksgiving:

It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you praise God, for your beauty, goodness, creating power and providential care: in making the world; establishing the covenant; teaching us how to care for one another and creation, speaking truth through the prophets; showing mercy in spite of our violence, selfishness and systems of oppression; and giving us the love of God in the gift of Jesus Christ.

With thanksgiving and faith, we remember the Lord Jesus, born into our world, breathing our air, celebrating our humanity, building community with all people of all ages, the despised, the popular, the powerful and meek, mourning our losses, dying in our state sanctioned violence, faithful to everything God laid before him, and steadfast in his redeeming love for us. In resurrection he showed us that death and all that leads to death can be overcome by this life and love.

Holy Spirit, draw us into communion with Christ and with one another; to nourish us in Christ’s body and in the beloved community you are making; to keep us faithful in ministry; and to hasten the coming of the reign of God, with justice and beauty.

Now praying as the Lord Jesus taught us, to God our Mother and Father, we say...

***Lord’s Prayer***

Breaking of the Bread: *(by Alydia Smith)*

When we share the bread, the pita, the tortilla and the rice, together we remember that Jesus was strongest and most powerful in his weakest and most vulnerable moments.

This broken loaf is the bread of life.

*<<bread is broken>>*

When we fill this cup we remember the common cup, and the abundant blessings that have been entrusted to us.

This is the cup of blessing.

*<<wine is poured>>*

*[when all is ready]*

The gifts of God for the People of God,

**Thanks be to God.**

### Blessing

**Christ,**

**You have gathered us at your table,**

**to bear witness to our unity in you.**

**Fed and nourished, may we leave from here**

**ready to be peace-keepers, God-bearers and kin-dom builders.**

**Amen.**

## CLOSING HYMN:

*MV 212 Enviado soy de Dios*

*MV 45/ SING! 51 Hamba Nathi*

*VU 333/NCH 43 Love Divine*

*SING! 190 Helleluya! Pelo Tsa Rona*

## BENEDICTION

In Uganda there is a saying:

One who experiences something good must share it.

We who have received, felt, tasted and experienced

the good news must share it.

Go, then, into the world

to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ,

in your words, actions, and deeds.

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*Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson*

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Barely Breathing*by Karen Georgia Thompson and Keon Heywood*

<https://youtu.be/0As6JlZYM1Q>

crossings and musings  
souls stirring  
swimming sounds   
of drums   
drowning  
this pain  
redeeming their souls  
telling our truth  
here is breathing

I want to write history  
I have stories to tell  
stories   
with no gilded edges  
with no ending planned  
stories of shame  
stories of death  
stories of wrongs ignored  
stories of life beyond the sea  
here is breathing

memories of trees  
manifesting the Divine   
in their leaves  
met with violence   
axe to trunk  
transporting people   
stacked as logs  
there leaves  
another ship  
blessed by their God  
cursing our souls  
who are we?

these are not fairy tales  
yet they tell of   
Once upon a time  
in a faraway land  
full of sunshine  
when royalty  
was Black  
Kings and Queens  
building wealth without castles  
loving our black skin  
kissed by the sun  
set gems  
like moon light   
leaning on the water  
here is breathing

walking in power  
at one with the earth  
reading time   
in the dust  
hearing rain   
in the silence  
the future carried on the wind  
the voice of the Mystery  
heard in the drums  
drunk on wisdom sublime  
here is breathing

no superficiality to express  
to will myself to experience you  
Black faces  
Black voices  
God is black  
seen in me  
created in Divine image  
Black as me  
I am no orphan  
a child of these Kings and Queens  
sold by a depraved theology   
brought to a wilderness  
no drums   
appeasing this torture  
here is breathing

beyond the sea  
at home among the dead  
named as animal  
trotting out   
at the whim of the other  
trotting in  
to their deprived communities  
whips  
absent of love  
bruises  
absent of grace  
rape  
absent of this God   
they said was so great  
what then of me?

stay in suffocation?  
no air to breathe

whey di card ah go draw  
for a church built on lies  
friends of all  
neutral in silence  
promoting the supremacy of one  
praising a God white  
missionaries stepping up  
affirming the conditions   
of the enslaved  
sanctioning land grabs  
exploiting Black lives  
robbing Black identity  
no breath in this Body

whey di card ah go draw  
for a church built on Empire  
missing social capital  
sipping sugared coffee and tea  
selling pie in the sky  
to transported Ancestors  
grabbing at gold  
grasping at glory  
grappling with God  
a corrupt cocktail  
of a hierarchal system  
drunk on power  
bloated with greed  
beaten with the Bible  
to ensure obedience   
strangling our souls  
where is the Life?

beyond the sea  
there is me  
Black skin   
shining in the sun  
sanity questioned   
because I dare to question   
being locked up  
locked in to the madness of inequity  
remembering the crack of the whip  
yet defying slave drivers  
standing up strong in my identity  
keeping myself in the knowledge  
of the warriors from whom I came  
here is breathing

beyond the sea  
resisting the will to be complicit  
to the diminishment of light  
of breath in bodies  
in a system where class, caste, color  
are used to concoct   
separate yet equal  
low wages for some  
mass incarceration  
unemployment  
poverty  
if we stay in sufferation  
swallowing the bile  
of trauma  
fueled by those who taught  
the skin I am in  
is sin  
nothing right  
words strangling my life  
if we not part of the change  
then we part a di degredation  
here is breathing

learning from it all  
I am royalty  
I am a supreme expression of the Divine  
I am history that did not begin or end with enslavement  
I am the wind in the trees, the voice on the breeze  
I am the wisdom of the Ancestors  
I am rich with melanin  
I am all hues and shades of brown  
another legacy of Ancestors transported   
I am breathing

1. Chinua Achebe, a prolific Nigerian novelist, poet, professor at Brown University and critic. He is best known for his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which is the most widely read book in modern African literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)