# Annual Meeting Sunday Order of Service (2022)

## Prelude

## Welcome

## Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

## Call to Worship (responsive)

One: Friends, for the sake of love, we are here
**All: Gathering as the body of Christ**One: Reflecting on our call to be the church
**All: Deciding how best to embody Christ in the world**One: Striving for justice, compassion,
**All: humility, and peace**One: Letting the unity of our oneness in Jesus draw us together:

**All: We are not alone
 we live in God’s world.**

**We believe in God:
 who has created and is creating,
 who has come in Jesus,
 the Word made flesh,
 to reconcile and make new,
 who works in us and others
 by the Spirit.**

**We trust in God.**

**We are called to be the Church:
 to celebrate God’s presence,
 to live with respect in Creation,
 to love and serve others,
 to seek justice and resist evil,
 to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
 our judge and our hope.**

**In life, in death, in life beyond death,
 God is with us.
We are not alone.**

 **Thanks be to God.**

## Opening Hymn

“We Are One” (*Voices United* 402)
“Come Touch Our Hearts” (*More Voices* 12)

## Prayer of Approach (unison)

**Generous God, giver of every good and perfect gift, we lift our voices today to express our thanks and praise. For family and friends, for our homes and this church community, and for your abiding and life-giving presence, we say thank you. For your love, which knows no bounds, and for empowering us to share your love with others, we sing your praise. Make us deeply aware of your presence today―this Annual Meeting Sunday―as we gather together to worship, in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

*―Adapted from* [*Called to Be the Church congregational giving program*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/called-to-be-the-church)*.*

## Theme Time

(Take notes on the responses you receive to the following questions so they can be incorporated into the children’s prayer and pastoral prayer. If you are prerecording services, you might invite comments in advance. In other online venues, you could invite worshippers to post responses in the chat.)

Ask: What kinds of things did you do this week? (*Invite responses.*)

Ask: And of all those things, what matters most to you? (*Invite responses.*)

Explain that Annual Meeting Sunday is a time to look back on the things we did as a community of faith together through the year and celebrate what matters most. It’s also a time to think about the year ahead and consider where God is calling our church to share the love of Jesus in our community and world.

Ask: What are some things we did as a church in the last year? (*Invite responses from the children and others in the community of faith.*)

Ask: And of all those things, what matters most to you? (*Invite responses from the children and others in the community of faith.*)

Show the children a möbius strip you have made. (See [How to Make a Möbius Strip](https://youtu.be/Z30c5wvoS_s) video.)

Cut down the centre of the mobius strip, following around the whole circle. Before you get to the end, ask the children what they think is going to happen when you finish cutting. (*Invite responses.*)

Finish cutting. (*You will get two intertwined circles.*)

Explain that while there have been many changes over the last year, one thing is exactly the same as it always has been (*Reveal the entwined circle*): Nothing can separate us from the love of God. God’s love is unending like this möbius strip and God is calling us―you, me, and our church―to love the same way God loves us.

**Pray,** giving thanks specifically for all the things the children mentioned, ending with the love of God that cares for us and inspires us to care for others.

## Children’s Song

“Jesus, Teacher, Brave and Bold” (VU 605)
“I’m Gonna Shout, Shout” (MV 183)

## Scripture

Deuteronomy 6:4‒9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

## Gift of Music

Anthem/Gift of Music

## Scripture

1 Corinthians 12:12‒31

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

## Sermon: For the Sake of Love

Sixty million cells. Thirty-six million heartbeats a year. Three hundred billion red blood cells produced every day. Sixty thousand miles of blood vessels in each body.

The human body. A complex, miraculous system. That, Paul says, is the Christian community.

And he wasn’t talking about just any body, he was talking about Christ’s body. A holy body. The holiest body. He told his community they were to be the “body” that Jesus would be if he was physically present.

“The body of Christ” almost sounds cliché. We may have heard that we are “the body of Christ” so often that we hardly pay attention to it. But think about the magnitude of what Paul is saying. Sit with the analogy.

You are―we are―the body of Christ. Wow!

There are 100 billion neurons in the brain. There are 54 bones in your hands. Twenty-five million new cells are being produced every second.

The body is constantly evolving, interconnected, designed for life.

For Christians the purpose of life is love.

Jesus’ body is designed for love.

So our body is designed for love.

Our church as the body of Christ has faithfully joined God’s loving mission this year.

We may have missed our sacred space and grieved not being able to gather in person the way we would like to but love is still very much alive.

In 2021, we were indeed the body of Christ.

(*Provide examples of how your community of faith lived into Christ’s mission in 2021. Celebrate creativity, flexibility, call, and commitment! Be specific.*)

We have joined the wider body of Christ through our collective Mission & Service, too. Together, we have supported partners in pandemic relief efforts to help provide personal protective equipment, safe shelter, sanitation stations, public awareness communications, and food hampers. We have provided over 8,360 full vaccinations to those living in the global South and East and $500,000 in COVID-19 emergency funding. In addition, $240,000 was distributed to partners in our region alone so we can help close to home.

The pandemic has not diminished our mission. The central call to love as Jesus loves is the same as it has ever been.

When we meet as committees or teams―whatever they may be―and as we meet today to reflect on the year past and on the year to come, we aren’t just ticking off agenda items. We are meeting for the sake of love.

When we are discussing the budget, our discussions are an expression of love. When we are schlepping around fixing God knows what in our building, or setting up a livestream (*insert alternative examples as they apply to you*), that work is an expression of love. When we are recording minutes, balancing books, and doing all the behind-the-scenes coordinating and organizing―we do that for love. When we are trying to figure out how best to comfort spirits and soothe hearts even while we feel dislocated ourselves―we are all about love.

Today, on this Annual Meeting Sunday, I’m not going to tell you anything new. I’m just going to remind you and me of who we are―the body of Christ.

What does that mean? Well…

Jesus reached out his hand and touched people who needed healing. He laid his hands on those who were sick and dying and extended forgiveness to sinners.

He ate with people no one else dared associate with.

With his voice, he told stories―parables that changed peoples’ hearts.

With his ears, he listened to the yearning of countless souls.

He got down on his knees to wash his disciples’ feet and brought children onto his knees to teach a lesson about what’s important.

He sweated in the garden of suffering.

He stretched his arms on the cross.

And at the end of it all, he appeared to his disciples to show them that new life is possible.

He used his whole being for love.

Paul says, “You are the body of Christ.”

In all that we say and do, let us not forget:

We are the body of Christ.

For the sake of love.

In 2022, may we continue to embody love.

Amen.

## Hymn

“One Bread, One Body” (VU 467)
“Christ Has No Body Now but Yours” (MV 171)

## Offering Invitation

Your gifts help transform lives, inspire meaning and purpose, and build a better world here at home and around the world through our community of faith and by joining together through Mission & Service. Let us share our gifts.

(If you are worshipping online, you might add a link to your donation page at this time. You could include the donation address if you are prerecording services.)

## Offertory Hymn

“Living Christ, Bring Us Love” (VU 599)

## Offertory Prayer (unison)

**Gracious and loving God, bless the gifts we offer as one body of Christ. We pray they bring healing and hope to everyone whose lives they touch. Amen.**

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Lord’s Prayer

While we have seen many challenges this year, we have also experienced many blessings. Let us pray together with thanksgiving for the year gone by and hope for the year ahead.

(*Begin the prayer with thanks. Give thanks for some of the highlights in the previous years. Weave in responses to the questions posed during the children’s time. Articulate why they matter/the deeper meaning.*

*Sample sentences:*)

* We give thanks for all those who made time to reach out to isolated members of our community this year. During a time when so many suffered from isolation, receiving a phone call meant knowing someone cared and made people who were struggling feel less alone.
* We give thanks for leaders who met far more than usual this year to try to adapt to new ways of being the church. Their faithfulness and commitment anchored us and ensured that our ministry would continue, come what may.
* We give thanks for our personnel committee, who encouraged us on our most difficult days and applauded us on our most successful ones. Their encouragement and support energized us to continue to listen for and lean into God’s call.
* We give thanks for our children’s ministry. The pandemic has affected our youngest ones deeply, and the compassionate presence of our leaders brought joy and hope into their lives.
* We give thanks for all those who ensured we could continue to worship together. We are thankful for (*those who spent extra time cleaning, adapting to protocols, helping to set up online worship, etc.*). Their support meant we could join with and open our hearts to the peaceful, loving presence of the Spirit alongside one another.
* We give thanks for (*name mission projects*). Those who were already vulnerable are even more so as a result of the pandemic. Every gift we gave brought a little more love into the world.
* We give thanks for those who gave generously to our common Mission & Service. By joining with caring members across the country, we were able to have an enormous impact, helping to transform lives at home and abroad in concrete ways together. We are thankful.
* We give thanks for all the behind-the-scenes volunteers. (*Name them. For example, those who ensure our finances are in order, who maintain our building, who take minutes at meetings, etc.*). Together, these humble tasks are the backbone of our church and truly enable our ministry to happen.

God of deep blessing, continue to enfold us in a spirit of gratitude. Let it carry us into the year ahead, choosing to focus on your abundant grace and faithfully responding to your call. We are the church for the sake of love. In every decision going forward, let love be our guide. We continue to pray in the way of Jesus, saying, “Our Father/Mother who art in heaven…”

## Closing Hymn

“We Have This Ministry” (VU 510)
“Draw the Circle Wide” (MV 145)

## Commissioning and Benediction

Based on Micah 6:8.

One: Let us go from here seeking justice, loving kindness, and living humbly with God
**All: Let us go and be the church for the sake of love.**One: And now may God our Creator, Jesus our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer be and abide with all of us this day, this year, and forevermore. Amen.