Celebrating in Joy
90 years of being United Church together by Maya Landell

PRELUDE
An upbeat medley of hymns through the ages

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SHARING OUR JOYS
Leader: Today we celebrate together 90 years of the mission and ministry of The United Church of Canada. I wonder if anyone else has any other joys and celebrations from this time, or times gone by, to share out loud with our church family?

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE
(Option: Sing verse 1 of “This Little Light of Mine” or play underneath the lighting the music of Voices United #82, “A Light Is Gleaming”)

CALL TO WORSHIP
The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to God.
This is the day that God has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Come let us worship our God!

HYMN
Voices United #412, “This Is the Day” or More Voices #122, “This Is the Day”

OPENING PRAYER
Holy One,
this day marks 90 years of being
The United Church of Canada.
We gather and give thanks for the times
when we have been communities of Christ Followers
who have made way for inclusion, compassion, justice,
and care to be known.
We celebrate this morning how the church has worked
toward living into right relationship with each other and
mending the world.
We also recognize that the other side of joy is sorrow,
and we receive your grace when we have tried and failed to
live out this love in action.
We pause to honour those who have gone before us:
leaders, educators, preachers, administrators, caregivers,
dishwashers, builders, bakers, storytellers, peacemakers,
musicians, and so many more—all part of the cloud of
worshippers.

(Feel free to name some people important to your congrega-
tion and context.)
As we lean into the future,
trusting in the Spirit’s guidance,
we honour the United Church’s
deep desire to live into right relations
with First Nations people,
its commitment to the intercultural church
that we are becoming,
and the shared joy of journeying together in hope.
May God’s possibilities abound. Amen.

PASSING THE PEACE
(Insert it as your tradition allows.)
We greet one another in the peace of Christ. Peace is joy at
rest, joy is peace in action—The peace of Christ be with you.
And also with you.

SING
“I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy” or Voices United #249,
“Rejoice in the Lord Always,” or More Voices #48, “I Can
Feel You Near Me God”

CONGREGATIONAL STORYTIME
See page 45.

A NEW CREED
Leader: On this day of honouring the joy of being rooted in
the faith tradition of which we are a part, we affirm our faith
together in saying A New Creed. (See Voices United p. 918.)
Or hear an anthem of A New Creed sung. (See united-
church.ca/planning/seasons/churchunion
for two musical
scores of the United Church’s New Creed.)

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
Psalm 16:11
You show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness
of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Tu me
feras connaître le sentier de la vie; Il y a d’abondantes joies
devant ta face, Des délices éternelles à ta droite.

(You can print this on different pieces of paper in different
versions and languages and have different people read it a
few times before the leader says:)
Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.
Thanks be to God.

Additional Scripture Selections
Psalm 100, Voices United #820 or #824; John 20:19–21, or the following:
WORSHIP

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard with our own ears—what we have seen with our own eyes—what we have touched with our own hands concerning the Word of Life.

This life was revealed and we have seen it. We testify to you that the eternal life that is with God, This eternal life was revealed to us.

We declare to you what we have seen, What we have heard, So that we may all be in community. And truly, our community is in the Spirit.

We are proclaiming these things so that our joy may be complete…

(1 John 1:1–4 paraphrased by Keri K. Wehlander)

SERMON IDEAS
Feel free to add illustrations from the history of the United Church. See united-church.ca.

Could the psalmist have ever dreamed what we would interpret joy as? Type “joy” into Google and see how many different things you find. Yet none of the references is like the joy—they do not even come close to God’s joy:

The joy breathed into us at birth. Our joy to the world. Tidings of wonder and joy. Wise men were overwhelmed by joy. In fact, joy is so important that forms of the word are used more than 300 times in the New Testament alone.

This joy is not about being happy or having all our wants satisfied. This is much deeper.

Defining Joy:
What does joy look like? feel like? sound like? Have you ever tasted that joy? When joy drawn from the gospel wells up in us, it brings with it a breath of new life. We are not the ones who create this joy; it is a gift from God. It is constantly renewed by the love and trust with which God regards our life.

Sustaining Joy:
Things that take away our joy can be labelled “joy suckers.” We all have joy suckers in our life, or perhaps we find that we ourselves are joy suckers. Jesus said, “I have come so that you should have life and have it abundantly.” And that means saying “no” to things that take our joy away.

Choosing Joy:
Reflection Question: What helps you to wake up to the joy that is already with you?

For further sermon ideas, consider using snippets read aloud from the books The United Church of Canada: A History edited by Don Schweitzer or A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking The United Church of Canada by Phyllis D. Airhart.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE
O God, hear our prayer (pause for silent prayer). Breathe kites high into blue skies, Sow bright mirth into circles of friends, Embroider brilliance into stars of night, and teach us how to joy.

Paint the air with lilac’s fragrance, Feast the earth with gentle rain, Clothe each creature with a whimsy, and teach us how to joy.

Dance the season with new colour, Caress each face into a smile, Splash creation with your laughter and teach us how to joy.

Loving God, we offer our prayers as people born into joy, recognizing this 90th birthday of The United Church of Canada and honouring those who participated in its birth. We pause now to offer our prayers of gratitude and celebration aloud or in silence…

Wise one, we recognize the people and places in the world where finding and sustaining joy are difficult (pause for silent prayer). We know there have been difficult times in our history, and we pause now to pray aloud or in silence for your wisdom in the years ahead…

Brother Jesus, you showed us there is joy to be found in following you, and we pray together the prayer you taught us and that we will continue to pray together for years to come.

Say together the Lord’s Prayer.

(Beginning used with copyright permission from Keri Wehlander, Joy Is Our Banquet: Resources for Everyday Worship, 1996, United Church Publishing House.)

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING
Leader: The soul sister of joy is gratitude. Let us now show this as we take up our offering and share our tithes and gifts.

OFFERING HYMN
Voices United #232, “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You” (Stand as you are able for the last verse.)

Either as another anthem or sung by the congregation, consider using “Abundant Joy” by M.E. Kish (found online at united-church.ca/planning/seasons/churchunion).

DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING
Voices United #541, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”

For a Minute for Mission, pick one that honours this day, or feel free to share a slideshow of photos from our churches, past and present. Find historical United Church pictures at flickr.com/photos/unitedchurchcda sets/72157623874947783/.
BLESSING
Be blessed with God’s joy on this journey, Christ’s strength for the way, the Spirit’s call to new possibilities each day. Go in peace.

CONGREGATIONAL STORYTIME

NEEDED:
• crazy scientist costume—coloured, curly wig; lab coat or big white apron; thick glasses
• large children’s book with new cover “The Joy of Joy”
• a bag of baking soda and different glass containers (beakers, etc.) full of vinegar and coloured with different food colouring. (Hand them out to different people when they come into the service or line them up across a table at the front.)
• a big clear glass vase for people to pour the different beakers of vinegar into
• a big plastic tub for the experiment to flow into

While the congregation is singing “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy…” Dr. Joysephine (woman) or Dr. Joy-seph (man) enters holding the book, “The Joy of Joy.” A small bag of baking soda is hidden in her or his pocket. Everything else is already at the front.

Introduce yourself as a famous researcher who has been travelling the globe and doing research for your new book “The Joy of Joy.” Hold it up. Say it’s very popular, and you’ve been working on discovering the secret ingredients of joy. You heard there was a lot of joy here at (name your church).

Then invite people to share things that bring them joy, and if glass containers of coloured vinegar have been handed out, invite people holding them to bring up the ingredients and pour them into the big glass vase. They do this until all are emptied in. Or if the containers are all at the front, once someone shares something that brings them joy, you add the ingredient and repeat what they have said.

When people stop sharing, say a few things yourself that they might have missed, then ask for a drum roll while you reveal your secret ingredient. Pour the baking soda into the vinegar and it BUBBLES over and over; so great! Of course, have a tub underneath so it doesn’t go all over the floor.

Say the following line:
Faith is the secret ingredient to joy. With God, joy is never-ending, bubbling over with goodness and new life.

Thank them for their contributions to your experiment and ask them to sing your theme song “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy,” while you dance or skip out.

(If the scientist and experiment format is too complicated, just gather the congregation’s examples of joy and share a prayer, giving thanks for joy.)