# The United Church of Canada/L’Église Unie du Canada

# Worship Service—Peace in Community

*prepared by Miriam Spies*

## Gathering

### Words of Welcome

Welcome, sisters and brothers, in the name of Christ who calls us beloved
and declares the way of peace and hope.

### Call to Worship

We gather together

in the name of the One who bids us come.

**We gather together**

**to hear the words of the One who is Love.**

We gather together

to sing praises of the One who teaches peace.

**Come, let us worship!**

### Opening Prayer

**Loving God,**

**We come before you**

**to worship your presence in our lives.**

**We come before you**

**with gratitude and admiration on our lips.**

**Be with us, with our community**

**as we celebrate your work in our world.**

**May we see justice and peace embrace. Amen.**

### Hymn

Creating God, Your Fingers Trace (VU 265)

### Prayer of Confession

**God of mercy,**

**As we journey toward peace we face many obstacles,**

**The path is not always smooth, the surface is uneven.**

**We stumble along the way,**

**in our families and in our communities.**

**Forgive us, O God.**

 *\*\*moment of silence for private confession\*\**

**Guide our steps so that we may see**

**the beauty of peace and love in community.**

**Strengthen us to continue this journey.**

**In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.**

### Words of Assurance

Then Peter came to him and said, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.” (Matthew 18:21–22, *NRSV*)

Jesus teaches us to practise forgiveness in abundance. It is God who also practises this, having love and patience for us throughout all our lives. Thanks be to God.

### Response to the Assurance

Know That God Is Good (MV 104)

## Listening

### Prayer for Understanding or Illumination

O God, you give us these scriptures to be a light in our lives.
May the words of love speak to our community today.

Listen, God Is Calling (MV 97)

### Scripture Readings

Matthew 22:34–40

1 Corinthians 10:17

### Response to the Readings

Peace for the Children (MV 149)

### Reflection/Sermon

You shall love your neighbour as yourself. But how?

Theme: Congregations must break the violence of silence and unite to overcome harm and hurt in the world.

#### Notes:

Peace begins with us, with our neighbours. Our self-understanding and that of others around us determine our ways of relating with the wider world. If we as Christians believe that peace on earth must begin at home, how do we ensure that in our communities?

#### Questions to think about/raise:

* How do we overcome racism, sexism, and similar cultures that violate the lives of so many?
* How can we work together to overcome barriers and conflict in our community and in our world?

#### Global Challenges:

* Communities are divided by economics, race, religion, gender, etc.
	+ Prejudice denies human dignity
* Communities or areas therein are plagued by violence and abuse
	+ Drugs, alcohol, suicide—self-destruction
* Access to health care, water, food, housing is unequal
	+ Gap between rich and poor is widening

*The points offered below are ideas presented at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, Jamaica, 2011 (www.overcomingviolence.org) and were offered as challenges to deepen our reflections.*

#### Dr. Martin Luther King III

#### Influenced by Quakers

* Poverty, racism, and militarism—triple evils defined by MLK
	+ What about other forms of discrimination?
* Mutuality and interdependence
* There will always be conflict—what we need to do is find better ways to deal with conflict with mutuality
* We cannot understand peace until we understand non-violence
	+ We need to learn to live this out, not only talk about it
* Promote greater understanding through mutuality and partnership
* “Be ashamed to die until we win a victory for humanity.”

#### Ms. Asha Kowtal

#### Dalit, India

* Gives voices to those in her community
* Expose the cruelty of the castes system
	+ Hierarchical social organization
	+ Largest systematic human rights violation in the world
* Discrimination is disempowering
* Teach non-violence to powerful, not disempowered
* There are possibilities for peace and justice

#### Dr Paul Oestreicher (Keynote speaker)

#### Quaker

* Peace demands a global rethink. Every discipline will be involved: law, politics, international relations and economics, sociology, gender studies, personal and social psychology, and last but, for us, not least: theology, the way we interpret the will of God.
* There will always remain a dialectical tension between the struggle for justice, and the need to keep that struggle peaceful. Peace and justice are often at odds. The psalmist’s dream that justice and peace will embrace, will kiss each other, is not yet.
* We know too that this new world will also depend on our will and capacity to cherish and preserve the natural environment of which we are part. War desecrates and pillages nature and squanders its precious resources. You cannot both care for God’s creation and say yes to war.

#### Vision

* God sent Jesus Christ, love incarnate, to teach us how to be in community
	+ To teach us to love one another
	+ To teach us to forgive one another
	+ To teach us to be servants for God and for one another
* Break the silence of all violence, all discrimination
* Become builders of a culture of peace as we engage, co-operate, and learn from one another, in our communities and globally
	+ Learning to prevent conflicts and work to transform them
	+ Empower those who are marginalized
	+ Affirm the role of women in building peace
	+ Support and participate in non-violent movements for justice and human rights
	+ Peace education is needed

#### Hope

* We are made one body in Christ, through the act of communion
* We will know just peace in the kingdom of heaven
	+ The first will be last and the last shall be first…
* The call to just peace unites us

### Prayer for Grace

Dear God, help us to live out this call to just peace, the call to create a loving and nurturing community for all. May we seek this vision every day. In Jesus Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

### Creedal Response

A New Creed (VU 918)

### Hymn of Faith

The Servant Song (VU 595)

## Responding

### Invitation to the Offering

Dear Friends, our lives are continually blessed.

Let us now bless the work of the church.

### Presentation of the Offering

Offertory Hymn: Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow (VU 541)

### Prayer for the Offering

Dear Creator,

We know all our gifts

come from you.

We strive to serve you

and share your love.

Accept these gifts

and those of our hearts

To continue living your way

in the world.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

we pray.

Amen.

### Prayers of the People

*[We suggest printing in the bulletin or on screen only the following:*

*One: Let us pray....*

 *O God, hear our prayers.*

 *All: And in your love answer.]*

This morning we remember that all our thoughts are prayers. When you hear “O God, hear our prayers,” please respond with “And in your love answer.”

Let us pray.

Passionate God, we are ever grateful for your love for us, for your patience and trust. This day we are thankful for the joys of community. We see signs of love everywhere—from handshakes and hugs to conversations and praying for one another. We pray for our community, that you continue to be with us in our happiness and weariness, celebrations and struggles.

O God, hear our prayers.

**And in your love answer.**

Merciful God, we pray for our world that faces so much violence. We pray especially for the people suffering war conditions and the threat of war. May leaders at every level learn to speak in favour of humanity and justice. We pray that all people can walk the path of peace, the path of forgiveness, the path of equality.

O God, hear our prayers.

**And in your love answer.**

Embracing God, we pray for those who suffer in our community and throughout the world. We remember friends [all those] who face daily persecution and discrimination. Enfold them in your loving arms. Teach us the power of love and forgiveness, that our words may be ones of healing.

O God, hear our prayers.

**And in your love answer.**

Almighty God, we offer prayers for those voices that have been silenced. We ask for your spirit of reconciliation to be near. We pray that there may be an end to bullying in schools, harassment in homes and workplaces, discriminatory laws and practices. May we learn the call to be bearers of peace and spread this vision through love and solidarity.

O God, hear our prayers.

**And in your love answer.**

In silence now, we offer concerns and prayers of our hearts, knowing you are always there to listen even when we may not have the words.…

O God, hear our prayers.

**And in your love answer.**

### Lord’s Prayer

Let us pray now, with the words Jesus taught us, saying…

### Hymn

When Hands Reach Out Beyond Divides (MV 169)

### Commissioning / Sending Forth

Let us go forward into this day with hope for our community, with joy in God’s loving care, and with courage to bring peace to everyone.

### Blessing

May the love of God surround you.

May the grace of Jesus Christ travel with you.

May the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.

This day and forevermore. Amen.

## Resources:

Ecumenical Call to Just Peace

[www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/wcc-resources.html](http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/wcc-resources.html)

World Council of Churches website:

[www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org)

International Ecumenical Peace Convocation website: [www.overcomingviolence.org/en/peace-convocation.html](http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/peace-convocation.html)