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

# Worship Service—Peace among the Peoples

*prepared by Brian McIntosh; adapted from Morning Prayer, May 23, 2011,
International Ecumenical Peace Convocation held in Kingston, Jamaica* (©2011 WCC)

## Gathering

### Greeting and Passing the Peace

L: Jesus said, Before you come to the altar,

 go, and first be reconciled to your neighbour. (Matthew 5:23–24)

 We come longing for the reconciliation

 only a generous God of grace can give.

 And so we extend peace to one another.

 The peace of Christ be with you all.

**All: And also with you.**

 *(people greet one another with the sign of peace)*

### Opening Hymn

“When Hands Reach Out Beyond Divides” (MV 169)

### Call to Prayer

L: It is the Christian hope and prayer

 that we live in unity amid diversity,

 but reality is different,

 and difference often creates division.

 As a sign of this reality,

 we ask you now to stand

 if you have experienced exclusion on the basis of:

*(pause briefly after reading each one)*

 race, class, gender, income, age,

 sexual orientation, faith, nationality,

 or for any other reason.

*(after people stand, ask the following)*

 How are we neighbours if we exclude one another?

 How are we to come together as one humanity?

*\*a moment for silent reflection\**

### Lament

L: Holy One, do not refuse us your compassion

**All: Or leave us to die in our wayward discipleship.**

**Kyrie Eleison (MV#67)**

L: We argue over politics while the poor go hungry.

**All: Have mercy, O God.**

L: We cut spending on education to build nuclear weapons.

**All: Have mercy, O God.**

L: For the sake of power and profit we oppress women and children.

**All: Have mercy, O God.**

L: Holy One, do not refuse us your compassion

**All: Or leave us to die in our wayward discipleship.**

**Kyrie Eleison (MV#67)**

L: We say we long for justice,

 as long as it does not inconvenience us.

**All: Have mercy, O God.**

L: We make declarations of unity

 while persecution continues for our brothers and sisters of faith.

**All: Have mercy, O God.**

L: We act to relieve suffering when disasters strike

 but neglect the daily work of building just peace.

**All: Have mercy, O God.**

L: Holy One, do not refuse us your compassion

**All: Or leave us to die in our wayward discipleship.**

**Kyrie Eleison (MV#67)**

### Confession

Creator of all living things,

**yours is the Earth and all that is in it,**

**yours is the world and those who dwell in it.**

Yet our words and actions deny that truth.

**All people are created in your image;**

**All people are born from your loving womb;**

**All people share a common humanity.**

We often forget that you are always present,

**working in every place and time.**

**in every good deed for the well-being of your people and creation;**

Confront and convict us with your call to peace, O God,

**in and through the Peacemaking One, Jesus. Amen.**

### Words of Assurance

L: This is what God the Holy One says:

 “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good,

 who leads you in the way you should go.” (Isaiah 48:17)

 Go in the freedom of new life

 to be a good neighbour to those in need,

 and give God thanks.

## Listening

### Prayer for Illumination

“Prayer for Peace” (VU 692)

### Scripture Reading

Luke 10:25–37 (The Good Samaritan)

### Sung Response

“When I Needed a Neighbour” (VU 600), verse 1

### Sermon Suggestions

This parable of Jesus, like that of the Landowner Who Hired Labourers, among others, is considered by most New Testament scholars to be authentic, that is, to come from the true voice of Jesus with little or no alteration by the gospel writer. Found only in Luke, as is the Father Who Had Two Sons, this parable revolves in subtle ways around the dual notions of right words versus right actions, on the one hand, and neighbourliness, on the other.

The lawyer’s question about eternal life, in the common rabbinic teaching method used by Jesus, is turned back on him as in a mirror. His answer, the great Shema or First Commandment of Israel about loving God combined with the great ethical teaching of Rabbi Hillel about loving the neighbour, is a good one. Only one catch: Jesus says he’s right, but he has to live it out to truly live. The focus for Jesus isn’t on intellectual knowledge, or orthodoxy, but on the right practices of faith, what liberation theologians call orthopraxis.

What follows is yet another question from the lawyer—does he think he’s cross-examining in a court case?—who appears to be less than satisfied with Jesus’ response. And to his question about who his neighbour is, Jesus responds with the much-loved story about the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. The last surprise is in Jesus’ last question for the lawyer after the story, in which he again reflects the original question back. Only this time he shifts the focus about who was the neighbour from who was in need to who was willing to meet the need, thus again defining neighbour as the active rather than the passive agent of healing.

It seems that if we’re to truly find life, eternal life in the reign of God, we’re going to have to actively and endlessly be good neighbours to one another, waging peace by crossing the roadside boundaries of culture, faith, history, even nationality—don’t forget that the words “good” and “Samaritan” were never put together by the people of the region in which Jesus spoke!—and entering by risky, trusting action the marginal domain of God.

The closing message, entitled Glory to God and Peace on Earth, of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, held in May 2011 to mark the end of the World Council of Churches’ Decade to Overcome Violence, began this way:

We understand peace and peacemaking as an indispensable part of our common faith. Peace is inextricably related to the love, justice and freedom that God has granted to all human beings through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit as a gift and vocation. It constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God’s love for the world. The dynamic nature of peace as gift and vocation does not deny the existence of tensions, which form an intrinsic element of human relationships, but can alleviate their destructive force by bringing justice and reconciliation.

Note the emphasis on participation in God’s love for the world, the dynamic nature of peace as our common vocation, in line with the parabolic call of Jesus.

The message then rather boldly declared the following about the last of its four themes, Peace among the Peoples:

History, especially in the witness of the historic peace churches, reminds us of the fact that violence is contrary to the will of God and can never resolve conflicts. It is for this reason that we are moving beyond the doctrine of just war towards a commitment to Just Peace. It requires moving from exclusive concepts of national security to safety for all. This includes a day-to-day responsibility to prevent, that is, to avoid violence at its root.… We continue to struggle with how innocent people can be protected from injustice, war and violence…[and] with the concept of the “responsibility to protect” and its possible misuse.…

 We advocate total nuclear disarmament and control of the proliferation of small arms.

 We as churches are in a position to teach nonviolence to the powerful, if only we dare. For we are followers of one who came as a helpless infant, died on the Cross, told us to lay aside our swords, taught us to love our enemies and was resurrected from the dead.

*(To read the entire message, visit* [*www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/
wcc-resources/documents/presentations-speeches-messages/iepc-message.html*](http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/wcc-resources/documents/presentations-speeches-messages/iepc-message.html)*.)*

### Hymn

“When a Poor One” (VU 702)

## Responding

### Invitation and Presentation of Offering

*(by local custom)*

### Prayers of the People

*(It is suggested that you use Prayer for the Decade of Non-Violence found at* [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org).)

### The Lord’s Prayer

VU p. 916 (A or B)

### Hymn

“Sisters Let Us Walk Together”(MV 179)

### Commissioning Prayer

L: Let us pray:

**All: God, give us eyes**

L: to see the wounded lying in our paths.

**All: God, give us hearts**

L: to show compassion for those whom others do not want to see.

**All: God, give us courage**

L: to cross the road and give comfort to those who are suffering.

**All: God, give us arms**

L: to carry those who cannot stand or walk alone.

**All: God, we long for a new vision**

L: so that victory by violence is no longer the norm.

**All: God, we long for new laws**

L: so that corruption and greed are no longer good practice.

**All: God, we long for new faith**

L: to accept the challenge that we are all neighbours to each other,

 created in the image of God.

**All: Amen.**