

Celebrating God's Great Work

An M&S Worship Service by A.H. Harry Oussoren

This service will work best as part of a larger program of education and promotion of the Mission and Service Fund.

Background Notes

The service will be richer if other program elements are planned to reinforce our shared work and witness through the M&S Fund.

- Visuals and other resources provided in the sanctuary to draw attention to the work of the M&S Fund will strengthen the worship. For example:
 - the M&S logo centrally located as a banner or as a projection
 - a globe marked with M&S partner locations
 - photos of partners and personnel
 - a brochure summarizing M&S Fund work around the world or in your Conference
 - M&S Fund pins to wear
 - a resource person to speak first-hand about what M&S funding is doing. (Check the listing on pages 46–48 for ministries in your Conference.)
- A special offering envelope for the M&S Fund might be distributed previously and could also be available today for worshippers. (M&S In Celebration donation envelopes can be ordered from UCRDstore.ca or by calling 1-800-288-7365.)
- Regularly use *Minutes for Mission* in worship on Sundays before and after this one. (Order from UCRDstore.ca or call 1-800-288-7365 or find them online at united-church.ca/sales/publications/minutes.)

Participation by many is the aim of this service because the M&S Fund is our shared work. The greater the diversity of leadership—younger, older, male, female, various cultural backgrounds, different gifts and talents, etc.—the clearer will be the message that we are all leaders and partners in the M&S Fund.

While the focus is on the M&S Fund, the goal of our worship is to celebrate God's great works—creating, redeeming, and sustaining—throughout creation. This is God's mission and all humans become people of God, when by the Spirit they participate in this divine mission. The way Jesus responded and contributed is for Christians the ultimate way of faithfulness and transformation.

In this service, faith, hope, and love are three key concepts undergirding our collective commitment to the M&S Fund.

WE GATHER AS A COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

CALL TO WORSHIP

People of God, welcome. We are part of God's global household, a caring community of worship, learning, sharing, and serving.

We come to worship the God who transforms all life.

God never stops creating, redeeming, and sustaining within us, among us, and throughout the whole of creation.

The cosmos is filled with God's glory.

May the Spirit of Christ be present in our gathering and accompany us in our scattering.

We bless the faithful, self-giving One.

HYMN OF PRAISE

More Voices #34 "All Is Done for the Glory of God" (consider alternating French and English)

More Voices #42 "Praise God for This Holy Ground"

Voices United #221 "Sing Praise to God, Who Has Shaped"

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

Let us await the forgiveness and the wholeness God offers to each and to all, as we pray:

Holy and Whole, you hold before us a vision of who we long to be and could become.

(silent pause for personal confessions)

Your Spirit calls us to be church. With the faithful who went before and those who will come after, you offer us the gifts needed to be the Body of Christ, people of God, co-creators of your new world.

Forgive us when our ears are closed to your call, when our eyes lose sight of Christ's self-giving, when we misuse your generosity. Free us from our fear.

(silent pause for confessions)

You are alive and present in the midst of all people's joy and sorrow, pain and healing, despair and hope.

Forgive us when we presume to limit your grace, when we pretend to control your love. Deliver us from idols and false images of you.

(silent pause for confessions)

Sung Prayer

More Voices #85 “Take, O Take Me as I Am” (on the repeat, try singing the plural: us, we, our, etc.)

THE GIFT OF GRACE

Hear these words and recognize the gospel: Love overflows from God’s heart: patient, kind, not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and never-ending (1 Corinthians 13:4–8, adapted).

God is transforming us and all creation! Hallelujah.

SHARING THE PEACE GOD GIVES

Accept now as a sign of God’s faith in us the forgiveness that frees us to live at peace with our neighbour. As we share that peace, we pray that it may blanket the entire earth.

The peace of Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

HYMN

Voices United #951 “Santo, santo, santo/Holy, holy, holy”

More Voices #50 “Alleluia”

More Voices #104 “Know That God Is Good”

TO SPEAK AND HEAR GOD’S WORD

WITH THE CHILDREN

See “*With the Children*”

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 17:8–16 “The widow of Zarephath” (This reading lends itself to being acted out.)

God’s generosity extends well beyond human boundaries.

Psalm 104:24–35 (*Voices United* p. 827 Part Two)

Praise for God’s many and amazing works.

1 Corinthians 13 “The gift of love”

Overflowing love is faith and hope lived out practically.

Matthew 14:13–21 “Feeding the 5,000” (This reading can be acted out involving all worshippers.)

In Christ’s presence, miracles of generosity and sharing happen.

HYMN

Voices United #270 “Dear Mother God”

Voices United #766 “As the Deer Pants for the Water”

Voices United #503 “When Seed Falls on Good Soil”

(or a musical word by choir, soloist, or other musicians)

SERMON

Faith, hope, and love enacted (see “*Sermon Suggestions*”)

TO RESPOND WITH GRATITUDE AND COMPASSION

Read “A New Creed” in unison (*Voices United* p. 918)

HYMN

Voices United #623 “Dear Weaver of Our Lives’ Design”

Voices United #678 “For the Healing of the Nations”

More Voices #171 “Christ Has No Body Now but Yours”

OFFERING GIFTS OF SELF, MUSIC, AND MONEY

We offer our gifts and tithes so that God’s mission of love, justice, hope, and peace may be strengthened here in our community, in our region, in our land, and throughout the world. May these gifts be evidence of God’s blessing.

WITH THE CHILDREN

BUILD A BOX BLOCK STRUCTURE WITH AN M&S MESSAGE. On Sundays before the M&S worship service, ask children to help prepare the boxes for a message to be placed front and centre on M&S Sunday (see sample messages below). Gather same-sized cube boxes (30 or 45 cm is ideal). Paint big block letters (one per box) using the colours of the M&S logo to create a message wall like the samples below. Same-size cardboard boxes can be bought from manufacturers—great for later use in book sales!—or collected from local merchants. Have enough boxes available for every letter and space.

During the service discuss with the children what the M&S Fund means to our church, locally and globally. Then invite them to build the boxes/letters into the message wall.

SAMPLE MESSAGES:

(46 boxes)
**M&S FUND:
 FRIENDS UNITED
 FOR GOD’S FAIR
 NEW WORLD**

(33 boxes)
**M&S FUND:
 FAITH, HOPE
 & LOVE
 IN ACTION**

(39 boxes)
**M&S FUND
 HELPS BUILD
 GOD’S HEAVEN
 ON EARTH**

HYMN OF DEDICATION

More Voices #191 “What Can I Do?”
Voices United #537 “Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands”

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

May God be with you; **and also with you.**
 Lift up your hearts; **we raise our hearts to God.**
 Let us give thanks to God; **and pray for the healing of creation.**

(Suggestion: Use the Minutes for Mission or information in this Mandate magazine to find specific M&S-supported ministries in Canada and on other continents for which to give thanks and raise concern.)

Response for Intercessions:

Spirit of the living God,
through faith, hope, and acts of love, draw earth close to your heaven!

HYMN

More Voices #173 “Put Peace into Each Other’s Hands”
Voices United #688 “O Day of God, Draw Nigh”
Voices United #697 “O for a World”

COMMISSIONING

It is time to leave this place. As you go, keep an eye open for God’s presence. Share in God’s joy wherever health, justice, and hope abound. Rage with God when you witness evil, greed, and suffering. Be part of God’s transforming love and peace, nurturing a new creation. By faith, we share in a common vision.

God is faithful.

BLESSING

May the Creator make us new people day by day.
 May the Christ we know and the Christ we meet move us to deeper faithfulness, and
 May the Spirit of wholeness and holiness breathe graciously upon us and all creation.
 Go in peace. You are loved by God.

The Rev. Dr. Harry Oussoren, an ordained minister, retired recently after serving four congregations and completing two terms in the General Council Office. He participates at Wesley Mimico United Church, Toronto.

did you know?

If every United Church member gave an extra dollar a month to the Mission and Service Fund we would have an extra \$6 million—a remarkable return for \$12 a year.

SERMON SUGGESTIONS

OPTION 1

Focus on the scripture 1 Corinthians 13. Faith is our relationship with God. Grace abounds as we deepen this relationship. Hope is the gift of faith as we learn to trust God to always be faithful, even when we are not, and when our world distances itself from the Holy One. Love is God’s essential being. As we grow in faith and hope, our love grows to embrace the entire world God loves so much (as revealed in the other scripture readings and in our experience). Through the Mission and Service Fund, our love partners with God’s to be a blessing locally, nationally, and globally.

OPTION 2

Focus on the scripture 1 Kings 17:8-16. Learning to be generous beyond our own and ourselves is an ongoing scriptural lesson. Charity and justice may begin at home, but in God’s world it extends far beyond human limitations. By current thinking, the widow was beyond God’s grace. In this passage and in many others, God’s Word keeps pressing us to be part of God’s cosmic love. By gifts to the Mission & Service Fund, the bounty of God is given and re-given, and the multiplier effect comes into play.

OPTION 3

Focus on the scripture Matthew 14:13-21. Even in the face of colossal need (5,000 plus people), the generosity of God is contagious and sufficient. As people of faith partner with God to feed neighbours and to care for creation, no one goes without and the loving justice of God becomes real for all. The Mission and Service Fund is a very practical and real means to enable each and all of us to be part of God’s global mission of love, peace, hope, and justice.