# The International Decade for People of African Descent

# A Service of Word and Sacrament

## Welcome and Introduction

The General Assembly (GA) of the United Nations has declared 2015–2024 to be [the International Decade for People of African Descent](http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/). In proclaiming this Decade, the international community is recognizing “that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected.” As people of faith, we know every part of humanity is a reflection, an embodied wisdom and the power of God, and yet all of our collective humanity has been diminished and ruptured through the enslavement of African peoples and the colonization and exploitation of those same peoples land. Chinua Achebe shares the African proverb that states, “Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It is important for people of African descent to tell their/our own truths, stories and histories. It is important for all of us to protect and preserve, to celebrate and enjoy the wisdom and beauty of God in our siblings of African descent, and by doing so, know God and ourselves in a deeper way. Ashe.

For more information on how the United Church of Christ and The United Church of Canada are engaging in the decade watch: <https://youtu.be/hFkQdEQ1BxA>

To learn more about the urgent need for a UN decade watch: <https://youtu.be/85lWC1UFUv8>

## Acknowledgment of Traditional Territory

<http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/acknowledging-the-territory.pdf>

CALL TO WORSHIP*adapted from Psalm 46*

God is our refuge and home.

God is our strength and center.

**God is a very present help.**

**God has always been and always will be, our very present help.**

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth has changed; though the world has changed; though our lives have been shaped by history out of our control and by present realities that threaten us.

**There is a river whose streams make glad, the diaspora of God. God is in her midst. They shall not be moved. God will be present to help wherever morning dawns.**

SONG**: Funga Alafia Ashe Ashe (We Come To Greet You, Ashe Ashe)**

*West African Greeting Song in Yoruba*

<https://youtu.be/bZFbbo0ezJg>

***Alafia****: A greeting, like hello with the meaning of “good health” or “peace” (like “shalom”). Alafia is a type of traditional welcome dance.* ***Fanga****: A traditional welcome dance. It’s often misspelled as “funga.”* ***Ashe****: (Pronounced “ah-shay”) The Yoruba believe “ashe” is a basic force emanating from the Creator that unites all living and non-living things. Some translate it as “amen” (although that word has more western connotations).*

***Funga Alafia, Ashe, Ashe (4x)***

***With my thoughts I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe***

***With my words I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe***

***With my heart I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe***

***This welcome is the heart of God, Ashe, Ashe***

***Funga Alafia, Ashe, Ashe (4x)***

## LEARNING TOGETHER

Research and share with the congregation some local Black History. Is there a historic site in your neighborhood? What was happening in your church around the time of the Civil Rights Movement? The Abolition Movement? Is there someone who can give a first person account of Black History in your community? Dig deep.

*or*

Teach the congregation a new song of change and resistance. Some songs that are easy to teach and in the creative commons are here: <https://art.poorpeoplescampaign.org/portfolio/getting-into-step/>. Or invite a local musician or member of the community to teach a song from the African Diaspora and to provide a little context for why the song is important to them, or how they have used it to bring about change or to resist evil.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (based on A Song of Faith) *Dr. Alydia Smith*

Today in our worship,

we recognize people of African Descent and lament anti-Black racism and violence.

We pray that the Spirit will reorient us:

**challenging us to live by grace rather than entitlement;**

 **expecting us to be a blessing to the earth.**

We pray that by acknowledging our brokenness, we will be closer to becoming a church where the good news is lived out:

 **faith nurtured and hearts comforted,**

 **gifts shared for the good of all,**

 **resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,**

 **fierce love in the face of violence,**

 **human dignity defended,**

 **members of a community held and inspired by God.**

Through our tears and silent confessions, may we witness to your love and grace.

*[time of silence]*

## RESPONSE/ASSURANCE OF GRACE:

God is our refuge and home.

God is our strength and center.

**God is a very present help.**

**God has always been and always will be, our very present help.**

## HYMN:

*Voices United (VU) 412/ NCH 84 This is the Day*

*More Voices (MV) 97 Listen God is Calling*

*SING! Prayer and Praise (SING!) 83 What a Mighty God we Serve*

## SCRIPTURE:

*(readings for the 4th Sunday after Epiphany or choose other readings as appropriate. You could read from Zephaniah 3:10, 12-14. Zephaniah was of African Descent, he is the son of Cushi and a contemporary of Jeremiah)*

 Jeremiah 1:4:10

 Psalm 71:1-6

 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

 Luke 4:21-30

## REFLECTION:

Consider having different people share ways that they have grown in their understanding and knowledge of people of African Descent and how that has affected their ability to love others as Paul commands. For people of African Descent, you may invite them to share personal learnings and how it has helped them to better love themselves and others. For people of non-African Descent they could reflect on times when they have been racist, or failed to love as Paul commands, and how that experience has transformed them.

Other questions for reflection could include:

What do you know about the history and legacy of slavery in your community?

What myths about racism in Canada and slavery are debunked for you? How? What harm might these myths have caused? Who did these myths benefit, how and why?

How has the church benefitted from the enslavement of people?

You could also share poetry from people of African Descent along with personal testimonies that reflect on how loving each other forces us to share in each other’s struggles and recognize our own ignorance, bias and/or oppression.

Possible poems to share could include:

* **Barely Breathing** *by Karen Georgia Thompson and Keon Heywood*https://youtu.be/0As6JlZYM1Q
* **A Brave and Startling Truth** *by Maya Angelou*<http://webtv.un.org/watch/united-nations-honours-maya-angelou/5240753944001>
* **I Can’t Take Care of my Family This Way** a music video from the Poor Peoples Campaign
<https://art.poorpeoplescampaign.org/portfolio/cant-take-care-family-way/>

## RESPONSE:

God is our refuge and home.

God is our strength and center.

**God is a very present help.**

**God has always been and always will be, our very present help.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**: Kumbayah**

***Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya,
O Lord, kum bay ya.***

***Someone need you, Lord, come by here
Someone need you, Lord, come by here
Someone need you, Lord, come by here
Oh, Lord, come by here.***

***Now I need you, Lord, come by here
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here
Oh, Lord, come by here.***

***We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya;
We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya;
We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya,
O Lord, kum bay ya.***

*[continue music during the spoken prayer, allowing amble space for intercessions]*

Loving Lord, come by us, we pray.

Come to:

The joyful …

The excited …

The grateful …

 The scared …

 The sad …

 The weary …

 The grieving …

 The distraught …

 The broken …

Come to us all we pray.

***Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya,
O Lord, kum bay ya.***

## PRESENTATION OF OFFERING

## MINISTRY OF MUSIC

Consider ordering a copy of We Are by Y.M. Barnwell, visit her website for an audio recording of an SATBB arrangement: <https://www.ymbarnwell.com/songs/>

SHARING OF THE PEACE*by Rev. Dr. Velda Love*

*Voice of the Diaspora:*

Who are my people?

What manner of soil gave birth to my ancestors?

When I go and search for their origins and first beginnings, will the soil receive me, welcome me, and teach me who I am?

What nation, tribe, clan, family line do I belong?

I imagine those who come with the same inquiries will fill the continent searching, seeking, asking and wanting to know … who are my people?

Which of the 3,000 distinct ethnic groups do I belong? Which of the 2,000 plus languages do I possess in my DNA? Who are my people?

Am I Dinka, Fang, or Fulani? Am I Watutsi, Zulu or Igbo? Do I descend from the Hausa, Jukun, Kassena, Kongo, Lemba, or Nande? Perhaps my ancestors are Wolof, Xhosa, Tsongo, or Zulu. I look into my eyes and think these are Ashanti, Ewe, or Maroon eyes.

I do not yet know. But I am confident my ancestors and their DNA reside on every country on every continent on this planet. My siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and extended family are Afro-Brazilian, Afro-British, Afro-Indian, Afro-Asian, Afro-Canadian, Afro-Mexican, Afro-Barbadian, maybe Afro-Irish, Afro-French, and Afro-Arab. For it is from the African soil that the Cradle of Civilization rose.

Oh, what a day that will be when we gather for the family reunion. There will be every conceivable shade of luscious brown, black, cocoa, and mocha ready to embrace, looking for a hug, smiling and greeting with welcome home. No one will be asking, “are you my people? We will be certain we are family and we are the people we’ve been waiting for. Ashe

The Peace of Christ be with you

**And also with you**

Let us greet one another now with signs of the peace of Christ and prepare for our invitation to the table …

## OFFERATORY HYMN

*Welcome Table: A Mass of Spirituals is communion setting based on familiar African American Spirituals that could be song by a choir or the congregation:* <https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/welcome-table-a-mass-of-spirituals-print-g8225>

 *VU 383 Wa wa wa Emimimo*

 *VU 469/ NCH 347 Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ*

 *VU 480/NCH 330 Let Us Break Bread Together*

 *SING! 184 I Need You to Survive*

 *SING! 8 Come to the Banquet*

 *SING! 185 The Jesus in Me*

HOLY COMMUNION *by Rev. Tracy Howe Wispelwey*

### Invitation:

This is the table of our Lord, a fellowship that endures history and the trials of our past, present and future with an invitation that rings out through communities and creation, calling you to come as you are. Come because you are beloved and invited, whether you know it or not, feel it or not. Come and be fed; come and find healing; come and be renewed for the journey ahead. Come and know that the Lord invites sinner and saint, oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, Indigenous and displaced, the corporate CEO and the migrant farmer, the bold and courageous and, the fearful and complacent, for we are one humanity, all children of our Creator, all in need of forgiveness and bread.

The Lord be with you.
**And also with you.**Lift up your hearts.
**We lift them to the Lord.**Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

### Prayer of Great Thanksgiving:

It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you praise God, for your beauty, goodness, creating power and providential care: in making the world; establishing the covenant; teaching us how to care for one another and creation, speaking truth through the prophets; showing mercy in spite of our violence, selfishness and systems of oppression; and giving us the love of God in the gift of Jesus Christ.

With thanksgiving and faith, we remember the Lord Jesus, born into our world, breathing our air, celebrating our humanity, building community with all people of all ages, the despised, the popular, the powerful and meek, mourning our losses, dying in our state sanctioned violence, faithful to everything God laid before him, and steadfast in his redeeming love for us. In resurrection he showed us that death and all that leads to death can be overcome by this life and love.

Holy Spirit, draw us into communion with Christ and with one another; to nourish us in Christ’s body and in the beloved community you are making; to keep us faithful in ministry; and to hasten the coming of the reign of God, with justice and beauty.

Now praying as the Lord Jesus taught us, to God our Mother and Father, we say...

***Lord’s Prayer***

Breaking of the Bread: *(by Alydia Smith)*

When we share the bread, the pita, the tortilla and the rice, together we remember that Jesus was strongest and most powerful in his weakest and most vulnerable moments.

This broken loaf is the bread of life.

*<<bread is broken>>*

When we fill this cup we remember the common cup, and the abundant blessings that have been entrusted to us.

This is the cup of blessing.

*<<wine is poured>>*

*[when all is ready]*

The gifts of God for the People of God,

**Thanks be to God.**

### Blessing

**Christ,**

**You have gathered us at your table,**

**to bear witness to our unity in you.**

**Fed and nourished, may we leave from here**

**ready to be peace-keepers, God-bearers and kin-dom builders.**

**Amen.**

## CLOSING HYMN:

*MV 212 Enviado soy de Dios*

 *MV 45/ SING! 51 Hamba Nathi*

 *VU 333/NCH 43 Love Divine*

 *SING! 190 Helleluya! Pelo Tsa Rona*

## BENEDICTION

In Uganda there is a saying:

One who experiences something good must share it.

We who have received, felt, tasted and experienced

the good news must share it.

Go, then, into the world

to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ,

in your words, actions, and deeds.

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*Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson*

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Barely Breathing*by Karen Georgia Thompson and Keon Heywood*

<https://youtu.be/0As6JlZYM1Q>

crossings and musings
souls stirring
swimming sounds
of drums
drowning
this pain
redeeming their souls
telling our truth
here is breathing

I want to write history
I have stories to tell
stories
with no gilded edges
with no ending planned
stories of shame
stories of death
stories of wrongs ignored
stories of life beyond the sea
here is breathing

memories of trees
manifesting the Divine
in their leaves
met with violence
axe to trunk
transporting people
stacked as logs
there leaves
another ship
blessed by their God
cursing our souls
who are we?

these are not fairy tales
yet they tell of
Once upon a time
in a faraway land
full of sunshine
when royalty
was Black
Kings and Queens
building wealth without castles
loving our black skin
kissed by the sun
set gems
like moon light
leaning on the water
here is breathing

walking in power
at one with the earth
reading time
in the dust
hearing rain
in the silence
the future carried on the wind
the voice of the Mystery
heard in the drums
drunk on wisdom sublime
here is breathing

no superficiality to express
to will myself to experience you
Black faces
Black voices
God is black
seen in me
created in Divine image
Black as me
I am no orphan
a child of these Kings and Queens
sold by a depraved theology
brought to a wilderness
no drums
appeasing this torture
here is breathing

beyond the sea
at home among the dead
named as animal
trotting out
at the whim of the other
trotting in
to their deprived communities
whips
absent of love
bruises
absent of grace
rape
absent of this God
they said was so great
what then of me?

stay in suffocation?
no air to breathe

whey di card ah go draw
for a church built on lies
friends of all
neutral in silence
promoting the supremacy of one
praising a God white
missionaries stepping up
affirming the conditions
of the enslaved
sanctioning land grabs
exploiting Black lives
robbing Black identity
no breath in this Body

whey di card ah go draw
for a church built on Empire
missing social capital
sipping sugared coffee and tea
selling pie in the sky
to transported Ancestors
grabbing at gold
grasping at glory
grappling with God
a corrupt cocktail
of a hierarchal system
drunk on power
bloated with greed
beaten with the Bible
to ensure obedience
strangling our souls
where is the Life?

beyond the sea
there is me
Black skin
shining in the sun
sanity questioned
because I dare to question
being locked up
locked in to the madness of inequity
remembering the crack of the whip
yet defying slave drivers
standing up strong in my identity
keeping myself in the knowledge
of the warriors from whom I came
here is breathing

beyond the sea
resisting the will to be complicit
to the diminishment of light
of breath in bodies
in a system where class, caste, color
are used to concoct
separate yet equal
low wages for some
mass incarceration
unemployment
poverty
if we stay in sufferation
swallowing the bile
of trauma
fueled by those who taught
the skin I am in
is sin
nothing right
words strangling my life
if we not part of the change
then we part a di degredation
here is breathing

learning from it all
I am royalty
I am a supreme expression of the Divine
I am history that did not begin or end with enslavement
I am the wind in the trees, the voice on the breeze
I am the wisdom of the Ancestors
I am rich with melanin
I am all hues and shades of brown
another legacy of Ancestors transported
I am breathing

1. Chinua Achebe, a prolific Nigerian novelist, poet, professor at Brown University and critic. He is best known for his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which is the most widely read book in modern African literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)