Called to Be the Church Congregational Giving Program, 2020

The Early Church in Eastertide: Worship for Five Sundays after Easter

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# Introduction

*Called to Be the Church* is the United Church’s giving program, but it’s so much more than that. It reminds us of who we are as Christians and what lies at the core of our communities of faith—things like awe and wonder, togetherness and community, enough for all, the glad breaking of bread, and praising God.

These are things we see reflected and modelled for us in the Early Church as recounted to us in Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles.

Over five weeks (the five weeks after Easter), we will dive into some of the stories from Acts, as well as some of Jesus’ stories of the Kingdom of God, and see what they have to teach us, or remind us, about what it means to be a community of faith.

If you have been a part of this worship community for a long time, *Called to Be the Church: The Early Church in Eastertide* might be like looking through an old photo album, looking back on younger (but not necessarily simpler) days. Scripture reminds us of who and whose we are, and the hopes God has for us—to flourish and serve as God’s hands and feet in the world.

If you are new to this worship community, perhaps *The Early Church in Eastertide* might be an invitation into fuller participation in the kind of dynamic and Spirit-filled togetherness you’ve been longing for. All throughout Acts, we see the Spirit adding to the community those who feel compelled by God’s vision of wholeness and peace.

Whether our community is big or small, young or old, urban or rural, or digital, or a mixture of all the above, we are all called as Christians to form the kinds of communities that are faithful to God’s Word and engaged in God’s mission.

These resources were prepared by Andrew Hyde, designated lay minister and chaplain for the Ecumenical Campus Ministry (Anglican, Presbyterian, United) at the University of Guelph and Lisa Leffler, a diaconal ministry student at the Centre for Christian Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba, undertaking a field placement with the Ecumenical Campus Ministry (Anglican, Presbyterian, United) at the University of Guelph.

### Children’s Program

The sessions that are included with *The Early Church in Eastertide* program can be used in a variety of settings. You may be in a situation to use them as part of a one-room children’s program for all ages. You may choose to use them as part of a summer program or March Break camp. Or you might incorporate them into a Messy Church program or other family-based activity.

Each session includes a small opening and closing prayer. If you have your own opening and closing rituals, modify or expand as you see fit.

Each session is based on the gospel reading that is part of the worship liturgy for the week. These are five lessons from Jesus on the importance of giving and generosity and being the church together—the parables of the Mustard Seed, Good Samaritan, and Great Banquet, as well as the Widow’s Offering and the Sending of the Seventy Helpers. Each session invites a retelling of the Gospel story and gives some suggestions on how to do that.

Each session also includes suggestions for four types of learning activities—something science-based, something artistic, something food-related, and something active.

Depending on your context and the interests of your children and volunteers, you may choose to offer anywhere from one to all four of those activities in your time together. For instance, if your children’s program on a Sunday morning consists of just a few children, you may choose to offer only one of those options. But if you’re using this as part of a Messy Church program, you may want to offer all four options, allowing participants to select their activities.

There are lots of great resources, recipes, and activity ideas available online, so each of the options provided here are simply meant to inspire you or point you in the direction of other ideas. Feel free to modify, improve, and fill in any gaps using the resources you know and trust.

Many children’s programs include a music component. You might be used to learning a song together and performing fun actions to the music. You may enjoy presenting a song for your community of faith. Or you may find value in having music playing in the background while your young ones engage with their activities and learning.

Check out the album *My Money Talks* by Bryan Moyer Suderman. It’s fun to listen to and sing along with, and touches on many of the themes lifted up in *Called to Be the Church*. Visit [smalltallministries.com/music/recordings/my-money-talks/](http://www.smalltallministries.com/music/recordings/my-money-talks/) to find out how to download a copy or order sheet music.

Our young people are an important part of the church we are called to become. They have much to offer, wisdom to share, and are of infinite value to God. Thank you for making space for them, for valuing them and their spiritual development, and for investing your own time and energy in this important part of the church.

# Sunday 1: Awe and Wonder

## WORSHIP SERVICE

### Welcome

### Land Acknowledgement

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

One: Jesus came to share the good news of God. He came to share in our joy and sorrows so that we may know God more fully. Let us take a moment to share our joys and sorrows in community with God’s people.

(*The congregation is invited to share exciting or challenging events in their lives.*)

One: We light this candle for the good news we shared, the good news in hearts, and the good news that wherever you go, God is with us.

### Call to Worship (based on Acts 2:43‒47)

One: We are called to be the church.

**All: We come to learn from the lessons Jesus taught.**

One: Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

**All: We come in amazement of the wondrous things God is doing in the world.**

One: All who believed were together and had all things in common;

**All: We come with our own unique stories and histories, drawn together in God’s love.**

One: They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

**All: We come to learn ways we can care for God’s people and creation.**

One: Day by day, as they spent much time together in the Temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

**All: We come to share in fellowship as God’s people.**

One: And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**All: We come to worship God together in community.**

### Opening Prayer

Holy God, as we gather today as your people, make us attentive to your call in our lives. Help us to notice the things you do among us, the things you stir in our hearts, the opportunities that surround us to share your love with others. Guide us in this time of worship, we pray. Amen.

### Hymn

“Filled with the Spirit’s Power” (*Voices United* 194) or “Will You Come and Follow Me” (VU 567)

### Prayer of Confession

**All: Holy God, we live in a world full of distractions. We are captivated and consumed with things that do not matter, often at the expense of hearing your call. Forgive us, we pray. Gracious God, hear our silent prayers as we confess those things that separate us from you and from each other…**

(*silence*)

### Words of Assurance

One: When we come before God, seeking forgiveness as our truest and most honest selves, we are met with mercy and grace. Know that you are forgiven from your sin. God still has things to show you and continues to call you by name.

### Gospel Reading

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31‒32)

### Hymn

“Your Love is Amazing” (*More Voices* 26) or “This Is God’s Wondrous World” (VU 296)

### Children’s Time

(*Play a game of “I spy” with the children. Help them notice different, interesting things in your worship space. Share how God is doing amazing things around us every day, if only we have a willingness to take notice.*)

**or**

### Conversation Time

(*Invite worshippers to turn to a neighbour and discuss the following questions: “What does it take to get your attention?” “What takes up more of your attention than you’d like?”*)

**or**

### Testimony Time

(*Invite someone from your community of faith to tell a story about their experience of being called by God to pursue something or take something on.*)

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_CHILDREN’S_PROGRAM)*.*)

### The Lord’s Prayer

### Responsive Psalm

Psalm 111 (VU p. 833)

### Hymn

“Teach Me, God to Wonder” (VU 299) or “Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works” (VU 308)

### New Testament Lesson

The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1‒19)

### Message

Awe and Wonder (*See* [*below*](#_MESSAGE)*.*)

### Offering Our Gifts

### Offering Song

“In Gratitude and Humble Trust” (VU 544) or “What Can I Do?” (MV 191)

### Offering Prayer

One: Holy Creator, we offer these gifts to you. May they serve all your people and help us come together in a community of your love. Amen.

### Prayers of the People

One: God of the universe, creator of galaxies and rivers and trees, author of hope and giver of peace, there is no end to the amazing things you have done.

Help us to take it all in. Help us to learn from the stories of others. Help us to notice your presence all around us.

Holy God, you call out to us in many ways.
Make us aware of all the places where you are calling us to serve and to give of ourselves— in areas grand and humble, in forums global and local—and give us a desire to contribute in helpful ways.

Compassionate God, there are many people and situations that weigh on our hearts:
people who are sick in body or mind, and need healing,
people who are persecuted and oppressed by systems of injustice,
cherished children of the living God who feel alone and unworthy of love.

In this time of quiet silence, we lift them up to you Lord…

(*silence*)

Hear our prayers, O God, and attend to them in your loving mercy.
We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

### Hymn

“I Can Feel You Near Me God” (MV 48) or “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (VU 220)

### Sending Out and Blessing

One: Go from this place to be God’s noticing people, attuned to the movements and workings of the Spirit around us. Let awe and wonder be your starting point and the blessing of God be your guide. Amen.

### Choral Closing

“May the God of Hope Go with Us” (VU 424) v.2 or “Go to the World” (VU 420) v.1

## MESSAGE: AWE AND WONDER

“We are called to be the church.”

This statement from A New Creed of The United Church of Canada is daring. It is challenging. And like the other affirmations it accompanies about living in God’s world and believing and trusting in God, it packs with it some important questions that we as a community of faith are going to be wrestling with over the coming weeks.

Who is “we”?

What does it mean to be “called”?

What kind of church are we called to become?

When communities like ours try to flesh out who they are called to be, they can be guided by the subsequent lines of A New Creed, lines that speak to things like celebrating God’s presence, living with respect in creation, loving and serving others, and proclaiming Jesus. But more often than not, people are drawn to emulate an example, to model themselves on the concrete experiences of others. So we might ask:

* Are we called to be the church as we were 60 years ago, the church we remember from our youth?
* Are we called to be the big-budget church we see across town, or on TV, or the Internet, with their mega programs and staff teams and professional branding?
* Are we called to be the church that does everything, that meets the needs and responds to the aspirations of every person who comes through our door, or are we called to be the church that does a few select things really well?

In looking for examples to follow, there is no shortage of communities of faith that get it right, and an equal number of stories of churches that get it wrong, and the vast majority of examples are some messy and confusing combination of the two. That’s why many, when looking for a church community to emulate and learn from, go back to the Early Church as described to us in the Book of Acts.

We might be drawn to the Early Church because of its proximity to the life and times of Jesus; some of the Early Church figures actually walked with Jesus and learned from his teaching and example.

We might be drawn to the Early Church because of its situation as a pre-Christendom example of following Jesus; it comes from a time before church and empire became co- mingled and better reflects our reality in a post-Christendom world.

We might be drawn to the Early Church because it was a smaller and easier movement to wrap our heads around. It was before things like denominations and traditions made the church branch out into a complex and dysfunctional family tree.

Or we might be drawn to the Early Church simply because of the compelling picture it paints for us of what it means to be followers of Jesus. The second chapter of Acts gives us the most concise picture of what that Early Church was like. It tells us that:

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:43‒47)

What a compelling picture of what it means to be the church! It is this depiction of the Early Church, and a few of the stories that surround it, that will guide us over the coming weeks, as we explore what it means to be called to be the church.

For many of us, the stories of the Early Church are compelling because they take us back to a time when the church was young. When trying to reconnect with our values and ideals, it is common to recall significant moments from our youth—those first experiences of having your gifts recognized by others, or articulating a passion for a particular line of work, or falling in love, or recognizing a problem in the world that we wanted to commit our life toward solving. Sometimes as we age and accrue experiences in this less than ideal world, we lose track of the idealism of our youth and become cynical about the world and our place and possibilities within it.

For some, the stories and examples of the Early Church are best envisioned as the experiences of a young church, a church that was still idealistic and visionary and believed amazing things were possible for those who live in God’s world.

If you take the time to listen to the young people in our community, or visit the closest campus ministry supported by our church, or if you just think back to your own experience of being young, you’ll likely recognize or remember that being young does not mean life is simple or easy. The challenges may look different from age to age, but the experience of being young has always been challenging. The same can be said of when the church was young, too. The Book of Acts is full of friction and messiness and challenges.

But a common characteristic of the young is their propensity for awe and wonder. Just think of a newborn opening their eyes for the first time, trying to make sense of shapes and colours. Imagine a toddler tasting foods for the first time and responding to what they like and don’t like. Picture a child exploring the world around them—wondering at grasshoppers, crawfish, and spider webs—or a young student riding a bus to school for the first time. Even the big kids who arrive at a university for orientation week can’t help but exhibit the qualities of awe and wonder as they take in new experiences and surroundings.

This is where our depiction of the Early Church begins. “Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done” (Acts 2:43). The foundation of a life of faith, and the core of any community of faith, is the awe and wonder we exhibit when we take time to notice the things God is doing around us.

There is a lot to take in. From the big, loud, and miraculous, as witnessed by Saul and the community at Damascus, when a life is changed in a moment and an enemy becomes a friend, to the small, quiet, and seemingly ordinary, as when a little mustard seed grows and becomes a home for others. God is providing signs and wonders all around us every day, if only we take the time to notice.

We as the church are called to be a noticing people. Noticing requires slowing down and rejecting the breakneck pace of society. It means seeing with new eyes and considering the perspectives of others, including the Divine. It means putting ourselves in situations that are new and uncomfortable, that are risky and full of potential. Noticing the big and small movements of God means seeing with the heart and imagination and faith, just as much as with the eyes and other senses.

A common description of worship is that worship is anything we do in response to the things God has already done. Worship, therefore, begins with noticing, observing, and taking in the things God is doing in the world.

As we begin this exploration of what it means to be “called to be the church,” may we begin by noticing the works of the almighty around us. May our noticing draw forth from us awe and wonder. And may our awe and wonder take us back to a place where we believed anything was possible for those who live in God’s world. For it is this kind of hopeful imagination we will need if we are to be the church God calls us to be.

Amen.

## CHILDREN’S PROGRAM

### Opening Prayer

God, we gather today to learn more about the stories of Jesus.
Help us to notice all the wonderful things you do
that surround us every day.
Open our hearts to your amazing love. Amen.

### Retell the Story

(*Retell the story of the Parable of the Mustard Seed, found in Matthew 13:31–32, by reading from a children’s Bible, by having the children act out the story together, or by asking questions about the scripture read in church.*)

### Sample Questions

* What is the smallest thing you can think of? What makes it special?
* Sometimes small things grow into big things. Can you name some things that grow really big?
* How are you growing? What’s something you couldn’t do before that you now find easy?
* How might a community of people grow? How is our church community growing?

### Activity Options

#### Science Activity: Planting Seeds of Hope

##### Materials

Ceramic plant pots, potting soil, various seed packages, decorations (e.g., stickers, paint, markers)

##### Instructions

Invite the children to plant some seeds in a ceramic pot. Fill the pot with soil. Choose and plant seeds. Add water. If time allows, invite children to decorate their pots.

The children might take the planted seeds home or leave them at the church for observation.

##### Discuss

Planting a seed is an act of faith. We hope it will grow into a healthy plant, but it doesn’t happen right away. We have to wait and hope, and we never know for sure until we see it come up out of the soil. Can you remember a time when you had to wait for something special? What did it feel like? What hopes do you think others have for us as we grow into the people we are becoming? What hopes do you have for our community and our church as it grows into what it is becoming?

#### Art Activity: Handprint Bushes

##### Materials

Different shades of construction paper, pencils, markers, scissors, glue or tape, Bristol board

##### Instructions

In our story, the mustard seed grows into a lovely bush that becomes a home for the birds. Invite the children to create their own bush. Trace around each child’s hands and cut out the handprints. Invite each child to write their name on their handprint along with something about them that makes them special. Wrap the finger ends of the handprints around a pencil to give them some curl. Gather the handprints and glue or tape them to the Bristol board in the form of a bush. If time allows, create some finishing touches (branches, birds, nests) out of construction paper and add them to your bush.

Think of a slogan for your bush poster and write it on your Bristol board (e.g., St. Paul’s United Church—Called to be a home for others).

##### Discuss

A church community needs to feel like a safe place in order to be a home for others. What do you like about your home? What would you wish to be different? How can we make our church feel like a safe place, a home, for lots of different people?

#### Food Activity: Feed My Birds

##### Materials

Large pinecones, birdseed, shortening, cornmeal, yarn

##### Instructions

Invite the children to make a pinecone birdfeeder. First, tie a piece of arm’s length yarn around the end of a pinecone. Roll the pinecone in a mixture of cornmeal and shortening, making sure to get the mixture in all the cracks and crevices. Next, roll your goopy pinecone in a tub of birdseed, sticking as much birdseed as you can to the pinecone. To finish, either hang your birdfeeder somewhere outside the church or put it in a plastic bag to take home.

##### Discuss

In order to grow properly, we all need to be fed healthy and nutritious things. What are your favourite healthy foods? What foods help your body grow and what kinds of things aren’t as healthy for you? What if we are trying to grow not only our bodies, but also our minds and our hearts? What do we need to be fed if we are to grow spiritually?

#### Action Activity: Nature Walk

##### Materials

Nature books for identifying trees, birds, insects, and so on; camera; audio recorder; sketch pads and pencils.

##### Instructions

Lead the children to a green area outside or near your church. Invite them to spend some time noticing all the beautiful things God has placed in that space. See if they can identify some of the trees, birds, or insects they see. Invite them to take some nature photographs or capture an audio recording of nature sounds. Make available materials to draw what they see. Depending on the group of children you have, you may give them freedom to explore the space on their own or in pairs, or you may remain as a group and notice things together.

##### Discuss

God is doing amazing things around us, each and every day. But we don’t always notice because we’re often too busy or moving too quickly. When we take the time to notice, we can be amazed not only by the big things God does, but also by the little things.

How might you make more time to notice the things God does? How might we encourage others to slow down and notice as well?

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for all the ways you grow good things—in us, around us, and in our community.

(*Invite each child to share about something or someone they are thankful for. You may pass around a sharing stone or other significant object to signify whose turn it is. Praying in silence and/or passing the object without sharing is always an option.*)

For all these amazing and wonderful things, we give you thanks, O God. Amen.

# Sunday 2: Together in Community

## WORSHIP SERVICE

### Welcome

### Land Acknowledgement

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

One: Jesus came to share the good news of God. He came to share in our joy and sorrows so we may know God more fully. Let us take a moment to share our joys and sorrows in community with God’s people.

(*The congregation is invited to share exciting or challenging events in their lives.*)

One: We light this candle for the good news we shared, the good news in hearts, and the good news that wherever you go God is with you.

### Call to Worship (based on Acts 2:43‒47)

One: We are called to be the church.

**All: We come to learn from the lessons Jesus taught.**

One: Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

**All: We come in amazement of the wondrous things God is doing in the world.**

One: All who believed were together and had all things in common;

**All: We come with our own unique stories and histories, drawn together in God’s love.**

One: They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

**All: We come to learn ways we can care for God’s people and creation.**

One: Day by day, as they spent much time together in the Temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

**All: We come to share in fellowship as God’s people.**

One: And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**All: We come to worship God together in community.**

### Opening Prayer

God you called us here to worship together in community. Each person here comes with their own unique gifts and experiences. Help us to learn from each other and to build a community based in your love and care for all our neighbours. Amen.

### Hymn

“Come In, Come In and Sit Down” (*Voices United* 395) or “Let Us Build a House” (*More Voices* 1)

### Prayer of Confession

**All: God of all creation, we know that all people are made in your image, but at times we fail to recognize your presence in our neighbours. Forgive us for the times we have walked by someone because they seemed different. Help us to celebrate the wonderful diversity in your creation and draw us together in your love. Gracious God, hear our silent prayers, as we confess those things that separate us from you and from each other…**

(*silence*)

### Words of Assurance

One: Wherever we go in life we are surrounded by God’s love and forgiveness inviting us into a community of care. Thanks be to God.

### Gospel Reading

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)

### Hymn

“I Come with Joy” (VU 477) or “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154)

### Children’s Time

(*Share with the children how the story of the Good Samaritan teaches the importance of being a good neighbour to everyone. Ask them to share ways in which we can be good neighbours. Brainstorm things that make being a good neighbour difficult, and pray for help in being a good neighbour to everyone.*)

**or**

### Conversation Time

(*Invite worshippers to turn to a neighbour and discuss the following questions: Who are the people “on the road” who are easy to overlook and walk by in your community? How might we be called to be a Good Samaritan to them?*)

**or**

### Testimony Time

(*Invite someone from your community of faith to tell a story about what it means to live together in community, sharing how they serve their neighbours.*)

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_CHILDREN’S_PROGRAM_1)*.*)

### The Lord’s Prayer

### Responsive Psalm

Psalm 122 (VU p. 845)

### Hymn

“Draw the Circle Wide” (MV 145) or “In Loving Partnership We Come” (VU 603) or “Walk with Me” (VU 649)

### New Testament Lesson

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–38)

### Message

Together in Community (*See* [*below*](#_MESSAGE_1)*.*)

### Offering Our Gifts

### Offering Song

“In Gratitude and Humble Trust” (VU 544) or “What Can I Do?” (MV 191)

### Offering Prayer

One: Holy Creator, we offer these gifts to you. May they serve all your people and help us come together in a community of your love. Amen.

### Prayers of the People

One: God, we praise you for all the wonderful things in our lives:
for good friends and good health
for good food and clean water
for safe places to live and to work
for the beauty of your creation that inspires artists to create beautiful and thought- provoking works
for all the gifts you have given us that make the world a wonderful, joyous, engaging place to live.

But God, amidst the joy in life there are still places of sorrow.

We pray for those suffering from mental or physical illnesses. May they know your healing. And we pray for their caregivers. May they feel supported by your presence.

We pray today for your earth. May we find new sustainable ways to care for the earth and all creation.

We pray for people impacted by natural and man-made disasters. May they know your comfort.

We pray for those suffering from political violence and unrest. May they know your peace.

God, we pray for your people wherever they are gathered.
Help us to learn from each other so we may come to know you more deeply and be guided by you love. Amen.

### Hymn

“Christ Has No Body Now but Yours” (MV 171) or “God, as We Rise to Leave” (VU 417)

### Sending Out and Blessing

One: As you go out into the world, may you be guided by God’s loving Spirit to build a community of care wherever you go. Be blessed by the Spirit of God to be God’s church in this time and space. Amen.

### Choral Closing

“May the God of Hope Go with Us” (VU 424) v.2 or “Go to the World” (VU 420) v. 1

## MESSAGE: TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY

Last week we began our exploration of what it means to be “called to be the church.” We noticed that the description of the Early Church given to us in Acts 2 begins in a place of awe and wonder, where people take time to notice and be amazed by the things God is doing around us.

This week, Acts 2 continues by describing how the Early Church spent much time together in community. “All who believed were together,” the scripture tells us, “and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44). Being drawn together in community is part of what it means to be “called to be the church.”

Why is being a part of a community of faith so important? Couldn’t we just read the Bible at home, on our own, and follow the examples found in the Bible, on our own? Why did the Ethiopian eunuch need Philip to explain what he was reading? Couldn’t he just Google an answer to his questions?

Our faith is deepened through interactions with others. This can be seen clearly in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. He was already reading the scroll of Isaiah, but it was not until he met Philip on the road that he learned that the passage was referring to Jesus. It was through his conversation with Philip that he learned all of the amazing things Jesus had done, and it was through Philip that he began to know God and asked to be baptized.

Studying theology from books is a good place to start, but it is through our conversations we have with people that we are able to know God more fully. We are all made in God’s image, but we are all made differently. It is through looking for God’s Spirit in others that we able to form a richer picture of God who is—Holy Mystery and Wholly Love.

But learning in community isn’t always easy. Holding all things in common, doesn’t mean the Early Church agreed about everything. When it comes to matters of faith, people don’t always agree. And those disagreements can have a huge impact on our life together as the church.

Some of the students from the Ecumenical Campus Ministry at the University of Guelph had been meeting for lunch once a week. One student posed the question “Why are there so many different denominations?” The short answer given was that when disagreements about theology or expressions of faith occurred, and they couldn’t be resolved peacefully, it often resulted in a new branch of the church being formed.

The next question naturally was “So what does the United Church believe?”

That is not always an easy question to answer. It is not easy to define our belief as a denomination. The response shared was that the United Church believes there is space for people of different understandings about Christian faith, and it is through our differences that we challenge each other to learn and grow deeper in our faith.

The students then sparked a lively discussion about how we can co-exist with people whose doctrines are so different that they can be hurtful and cause harm. Some doctrines and interpretations of faith seem to preach segregation and hate, instead of the love and inclusion we see reflected in Jesus. How can we care for neighbours who don’t seem to care for us?

The call is simple, even if it may not be easy. “‘[L]ove the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’… ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:30, 31).

We are called to love our neighbours in spite of the challenges we may face. Loving your neighbour doesn’t always mean that you will agree with your neighbour, but it does mean that when you disagree—because at some point you probably will disagree—you will approach the disagreement respectfully. Take the time to consider and understand, in the best way that you can, where the other person is coming from, and then be patient as you respectfully share your point of view. It won’t happen instantly, but if you can open a channel of dialogue, you can create positive and lasting changes in a person’s worldview. You might even learn something yourself.

As you attempt to form that dialogue, it is important to remember that being “called to be the church” means we are called to love our neighbour as ourselves. That means that you have to love yourself too! If you find yourself in a disagreement where you begin to feel unsafe, physically, emotionally, or spiritually, it is okay to walk away. Try giving the conversation to God in prayer. Then either try to engage your neighbour again another day, or be at peace enough to leave the conversation for someone else to engage. Knowing proper boundaries is part of what it means to be “called to be the church” as well.

It is through our interactions with one another—talking about what we believe, sharing a meal together, contributing to causes we care about, even across our differences—that we begin to build communities of care. And it is through our communities and networks of care that God’s kingdom is revealed and made known to us in very real ways—a loving, if sometimes messy, kingdom where we are all drawn together in community and all are “called to be the church” together.

## CHILDREN’S PROGRAM

### Opening Prayer

God, we gather today to learn more about the stories of Jesus.
Help us learn how to care for all our neighbours and teach us to celebrate our differences,
so we can all be together in community. Amen.

### Retell the Story

(*Retell the Parable of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:25–37, by reading the story from a children’s Bible, or by having the children act out the story together, or by asking questions about the scripture read in church.*)

### Sample Questions

* Why did the first two people pass by the injured man?
* Who helped the injured man in the story?
* Who was being a good neighbour?

### Activity Options

#### Science Activity: Safety Search of the Church

##### Materials

Safety Search Worksheet (see [below](#_Science_Activity:_Safety); print enough for everyone); pencils/pens

##### Instructions

Have the children hunt around the church and find the safety items noted on their worksheets. Encourage them to fill out their sheets.

##### Discuss

Part of caring for our neighbours is being prepared for when accidents happen. How do you prepare for accidents at home? Talk about fire safety plans, what to do in the case of an accident, where bandages are kept, how to call emergency services, etc. Share how God cares for us, too, discussing situations where things go as planned and situations where accidents happen.

#### Art Activity: Fitting Together

##### Materials

Simple puzzle packs of approximately 10–12 pieces (one puzzle for every 2–4 kids). For each puzzle set, mark the backs of each piece with a coloured sticker or marker, so you can quickly identify which pieces belong to the blue puzzle, red puzzle, green puzzle, etc.

##### Instructions

Hide the puzzle pieces around your space. Arrange the children in teams (blue, red, green, etc.) and have them search for their puzzle pieces. As they find their pieces, they can begin assembling their puzzle. Play one round where the first team to assemble their puzzle wins; plan another round where the teams help each other and all win once all of the puzzles are complete.

##### Discuss

Did you have a plan for completing your puzzle? Did different people play different roles in your plan? We all have different skills and abilities, so when we work together, we can do things more effectively than when we work on our own. Isn’t it wonderful that God makes us all different and calls us together to help one another!

#### Food Activity: Gingerbread Neighbours

##### Materials

Gingerbread cookies in human form (either store-bought or homemade), icing, candy decorations, plastic gloves for handling food. Break up some of the gingerbread people ahead of time.

##### Instructions

Invite the children to mend the gingerbread cookies using icing and decorations.

##### Discuss

Gingerbread people are fun because we can put them back together with icing. People are sometimes trickier to put back together. Who are the people who put us back together when we feel broken? How does God help us when we feel we need to be put back together?

#### Action Activity: Dramatize the Story

##### Materials

Fun/silly costumes; a children’s Bible that includes the story of the Good Samaritan

##### Instructions

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan and have the children act it out.

##### Discuss

Who are the people in your everyday life who get ignored? How can you be a Good Samaritan to them? How can we as a church be Good Samaritans to the ignored people of our community? Make up some “case study” examples of a person in need of help (e.g., a child being bullied at school, a new neighbour who just moved to your neighbourhood) and invite the children to share how they might be a good neighbour in that situation.

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for all the ways you help us to learn and grow together in this community.

(*Invite each child to share about something or someone they are thankful for. You may pass around a sharing stone or other significant object to signify whose turn it is to pray. Praying in silence and/or passing the object without sharing is always an option.*)

For all these things, we give you thanks, O God. Amen.

## Safety Search Worksheet

How many fire extinguishers are there?

Where are the fire extinguishers?

How many smoke detectors are there?

Where are the smoke detectors?

How many first aid kits are there?

What is in the first aid kits?

# Sunday 3: Enough for All

## WORSHIP SERVICE

### Welcome

### Land Acknowledgement

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

One: Jesus came to share the good news of God. He came to share in our joy and sorrows so we may know God more fully. Let us take a moment to share our joys and sorrows in community with God’s people.

(*The congregation is invited to share exciting or challenging events in their lives.*)

One: We light this candle for the good news we shared, the good news in hearts, and the good news that wherever you go God is with you.

### Call to Worship (based on Acts 2:43‒47)

One: We are called to be the church.

**All: We come to learn from the lessons Jesus taught.**

One: Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

**All: We come in amazement of the wondrous things God is doing in the world.**

One: All who believed were together and had all things in common;

**All: We come with our own unique stories and histories, drawn together in God’s love.**

One: They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

**All: We come to learn ways we can care for God’s people and creation.**

One: Day by day, as they spent much time together in the Temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

**All: We come to share in fellowship as God’s people.**

One: And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**All: We come to worship God together in community.**

### Opening Prayer

Loving God, Holy One, speak to us today. Grow something good in our community. Expand our imaginations of what is possible. Stretch our understandings, that we might more fully know the depth and breadth of your love for all Creation. This we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### Hymn

“Let Us Build a House” (*More Voices* 1) or “Spirit, Open My Heart” (MV 79)

### Prayer of Confession

**All: God who defies expectations, we confess that sometimes in our need to feel we belong, in our haste to find places of safety and comfort, we sometimes close the door on others. We create barriers between us and them. We set limits and boundaries and conditions on the grace that you give us—grace meant for sharing. Forgive us, loving God, and open our minds and our hearts, that there might be room for the Spirit to enter in. Gracious God, hear our silent prayers as we confess those things that separate us from you and from each other…**

(*silence*)

### Words of Assurance

One: There is good news in the promises of scripture and the ever expanding embrace of God. When we lay before God our sins and our shortcomings, our shame is washed away, and we stand as new creations, showered in the abundant goodness of God. Thanks be to God.

### Gospel Reading

The Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:16–23)

### Hymn

“All Who Are Thirsty” (MV 4) or “My Love Colours Outside the Line” (MV 138)

### Children’s Time

(*Ask the children to reflect on the things that make for a great party. They might suggest things like food, games, and presents. What about friends? Friends make a party fun. If God threw a party, who do you think God would invite—lots of people or only a few? God invites all of us.*)

**or**

### Conversation Time

(*Invite worshippers to turn to a neighbour and discuss the following questions. Have you ever received an invitation that surprised you? Have you ever taken a risk inviting someone to something you were hosting? What happened? What blessed you? What was hard?*)

**or**

### Testimony Time

(*Invite someone from your community of faith to tell a story about a time when someone reached out to them unexpectedly.*)

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_CHILDREN’S_PROGRAM_2).)

### The Lord’s Prayer

### Responsive Psalm

Psalm 67 (*Voices United* p. 786)

### Hymn

“Dear God, Who Loves All Humankind” (VU 608) or “Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples” (VU 507)

### New Testament Lesson

Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–24, 34–48)

### Message

Enough for All (*See* [*below*](#_MESSAGE_2)*.*)

### Offering Our Gifts Offering Song

“In Gratitude and Humble Trust” (VU 544) or “What Can I Do?” (MV 191)

### Offering Prayer

One: Holy Creator, we offer these gifts to you. May they serve all your people and help us come together in a community of your love. Amen.

### Prayers of the People

*Sung refrain:* “There Is Room for All” (MV 62)

One: In God’s love there is plenty of room for us all.
Room for the sinner, and room for the saint.
Room for the popular, and room for the outcast.
Room for young and old, short and tall.
Room for all colours and gender expressions, sexual orientations and creeds.

*Sung refrain:* “There Is Room for All” (MV 62)

One: In God’s embrace there is room for the whole and the broken.
Room for the stranger and friend.
Room for the steadfast and sure.
Room for the curious and doubting.
Room for oppressor and oppressed.

*Sung refrain:* “There Is Room for All” (MV 62)

In God’s care and concern there is room for our prayers.
Prayers made in public, prayers made in private.
Prayers made of eloquent wording, prayers made by the yearning of our hearts.
There is room for the prayers that we make in this silence, prayers that we bring before God right now…

(*silence*)

There is plenty of room in God’s love for us all. Plenty of room for our prayers.

*Sung refrain:* “There Is Room for All” (MV 62)

### Hymn

“We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky” (MV 143) or “In Christ There is No East or West” (VU 606)

### Sending Out and Blessing

One: Follow God’s call out from this place, and seek God’s face in God’s people everywhere. Take with you the blessing of the Holy Spirit, who moves amongst us inviting all people into God’s expanding story of love.

### Choral Closing

“May the God of Hope Go with Us” (VU 424) verse 2 or “Go to the World” (VU 420) verse 1

## MESSAGE: ENOUGH FOR ALL

Hail, hail, the gang’s all here!

Some of us, of a certain vintage, might remember singing this song or something like it at a party or gathering or community social. There’s nothing quite like the comfort of being gathered together with all of your people.

It’s the kind of song, too, that we might want to imagine the Early Church singing as they gathered to worship, to take care of one another, and to share stories of the amazing things God had been doing around them. The Early Church had a profound sense of community, a togetherness whereby they combined their resources and made sure there was enough for all.

“[T]hey would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all,” scripture tells us, “as any had need” (Acts 2:45).

When we imagine a community holding all things in common and tending to one another’s needs, we might be inclined to think of them as an inward-looking and protectionist group. “We take care of our own,” is a sentiment we hear bandied about even today, especially when resources and imagination and compassion feel scarce.

But God’s call, God’s call to be the church, takes us to another place.

We’ve been exploring what it means to be called to be the church. Beginning from a posture of awe and wonder, we’ve seen God’s call gather us together—across our differences—to form community. This week, we pause to consider how God’s call expands our sense of who “we” are—who the “all” is that we’re concerned with—and breaks down the barriers between different communities.

Peter, in our scripture today, came from humble origins. At the start of his story, “all” his people likely consisted of his family and the fellow fisher folk he worked with. God’s call, however, sweeps him up into a movement of people who walk with Jesus. That same call pushes Peter beyond that community of common experience to a deepening connection with others who also feel God’s call and come from circumstances that defy expectations:

* a centurion who was a devout man, and prayed constantly, and gave generously to others
* a gentile household who received the Word of God, as well as the Holy Spirit
* a family of people who profaned Peter’s understanding of dietary laws and religious practice, but longed to be baptized
* a contributor to unjust systems of empire and oppression, serving as a testimony to the love of God in Jesus

Could such people be part of what God was doing, according to Peter’s previous mindset? Did God’s love and concern extend to them as well?

Could such people be called to carry God’s hopes for the world, just as we are?

“What God has made clean,” the Lord declares in Peter’s vision, “you must not call profane” (Acts 10:15).

“I truly understand that God shows no partiality,” proclaims Peter to his Gentile listeners, “but in every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to [God]” (Acts 10:34, 35).

God’s call challenges and expands our understanding of who “we” are. It stretches our sense of the “all” whom we are called to care about, tend, partner with, and feel responsibility for.

“Hail, hail, the gang’s all here!” But it’s not. When we look around our church, we know that the broadness, the diversity, the reach of who God cares for and includes is not “all” here. Not at all.

As a church, we are called to work together to grow our sense of who we are, who we care about, who we tend, and remind ourselves of the important partnerships we have with people well beyond our own community of faith.

The Mission and Service of The United Church of Canada is one way by which our church helps broaden our sense of who our “all” is.

Through the Minute for Mission stories we share, we hear about community ministries that serve the poor, campus ministries that walk alongside students, and camps that stir imagination in children.

(*Feel free to insert stories from Mission & Service that have captured your attention this past year. Visit united-church.ca for* [*Stories of Our Mission*](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/generosity-through-mission-and-service/stories-our-mission)*.*)

Through the Gifts with Vision program, we nurture justice initiatives, food programs, and advocacy work among our global partners.

(*Feel free to insert stories of projects in* [*Gifts with Vision*](https://giftswithvision.ca/blogs/stories) *that have inspired your community this past year.*)

Through our givings to the Mission & Service of the United Church, we are reminded that these partners, these communities that exist beyond our experience and imagination, are actually part of us, that the work of the Spirit pushes us out beyond our comfort, and that God is already doing a new thing beyond the scope of our care and concern.

“All my relations” is a vision gifted to our church by our Indigenous brothers and sisters. It is now featured on our United Church crest. This vision challenges us to see all people, and even Creation itself, as part of an interconnected family of mutual care and concern. It echoes the Early Church practice of ensuring there was enough for all and the Holy Spirit’s call to expand our sense of the “all.”

As we live into what it means to be “called to be the church,” may we be people with an expanding sense of who we are, who God loves, and who we are responsible for.

Amen.

## CHILDREN’S PROGRAM

### Opening Prayer

God, we gather today to learn more about the stories of Jesus.
Teach us to share what we have,
so we can all be a community where there is enough for all. Amen.

### Retell the Story

(*Retell the story of the Parable of the Great Banquet, found in Luke 14:16–24, by reading from a children’s Bible, or by having the children act out the story together, or by asking questions about the scripture read in church.*)

### Sample Questions

* Who did the owner of the house originally invite to his banquet? Could they come?
* Do you think they wanted to come to the banquet or not?
* Who did the owner of the house invite to his banquet when his guests couldn’t come?
* Did they fill up all the spaces, or was there still room for more?

### Activity Options

#### Science Activity: Elephant Toothpaste

##### Materials

A clean 16-ounce plastic soda bottle, 1/2 cup of 20-volume hydrogen peroxide (20-volume is a 6% solution from a beauty supply store or hair salon), 1 tablespoon of dry yeast, 2 tablespoons of warm water, liquid dishwashing soap, food colouring, small cup, safety goggles and gloves. Note: the resulting foam will overflow from the bottle, so be sure to do this activity on a washable or disposable surface.

##### Instructions

Show the children the materials for this experiment and ask them whether they think there is enough to fill the whole bottle. Have an adult (wearing safety goggles and gloves) pour the hydrogen peroxide into the bottle. Add 8 drops of food colouring to the bottle. Add the liquid dish soap to the bottle and mix gently. In a separate cup, combine the warm water and yeast together and mix for approximately 30 seconds. When ready, pour the yeast water mixture into the bottle (using a funnel if you choose). Watch the foaminess begin!

##### Compare

Check out the University of Guelph’s attempt to set the [world record for elephant toothpaste](cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/university-guelph-physics-club-elephant-toothpaste-record-1.5129856)! (Visit cbc.ca/news and search “elephant toothpaste.”)

##### Discuss

Were you surprised by the results of our experiment? What surprised you? Sometimes we don’t always get the reaction we anticipate: a friend doesn’t come to our house when we invite them; you try really hard at something but don’t get the results you hope for; a prayer doesn’t get answered the way you wanted. The man in today’s story didn’t have his banquet go the way he planned, but because he was mindful of others and shared what he had, his banquet was likely better than he even imagined.

#### Art Activity: Invitations to Church

##### Materials

Cardstock or construction paper, scissors and/or paper punches, markers, crayons, pencil crayons, anything you can use to decorate an invitation. Worship times and church address for children to copy onto cards. Also include any details of a special service or event coming up.

##### Instructions

Invite the children to make invitations that can be shared, inviting people to come to church. Invitations should include a welcoming message, details about the time and location of your church service/event, and a space for the sender to write a message and include their name.

##### Discuss

The church is a place that is open to everyone, but sometimes it can be scary (or intimidating) to go to a place where you have never been before. Do you remember what it was like to come to church for the first time? Do you ever get anxious going to a new place? How can we make the church a more inviting place for people?

Just like the man in the banquet, not everyone we invite to church will come. This may be because they have their own church or practice a different faith or maybe they are just not ready for church. That’s okay because you can invite other people, or invite those same people again another time. What are some of your favourite things about church that you could tell people about?

#### Food Activity: Setting the Table

##### Materials

Snacks and drinks for everyone in your group, tablecloths and napkins, plates, cups, utensils. Decorations or other things to make your banquet table fancy.

##### Instructions

Work together to set a nice table for a fancy banquet. Make sure there is a special place for everyone. This can be an opportunity for people from your church to teach the children the “proper” way to set a table, or it can be an opportunity to let creative freedom loose. Once everything is ready, enjoy your banquet feast together.

##### Discussion

What is your favourite memory of a special, fancy meal you have had? What made it so special? Do we ever do fancy banquets at church? How can we make sure we always make room for people who have little to eat, or who receive few invitations to fun things like banquets?

#### Action Activity: Room for All

##### Option One: No-elimination Musical Chairs

Gather enough chairs for everyone in your group. Play some music and invite people to mingle and dance around the chairs. When the music stops, everyone finds a seat. Each round, remove a chair but not a person. The challenge is to make sure there is room for everyone.

##### Option Two: Shrinking Island

Place a tarp or large blanket on the ground to form an island. Invite everyone to find a place on the island. See if everyone fits. Have everyone jump off the island and shrink it by folding the blanket. See if everyone fits now. Reduce the island little by little until it becomes really difficult to fit everyone on the island.

##### Discuss

It’s not always easy to share, is it? Working together is important if we are going to make sure that there is enough for all. How can we share to make sure everyone has what they need?

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for inviting us to your banquet, both here in this world and in the age to come. Thank you for all the gifts and goodness that you share with us.

(*Invite each child to share about something or someone they are thinking of. You may pass around a sharing stone or other significant object to signify whose turn it is to pray. Praying in silence and/or passing the object without sharing is always an option.*)

For all these things, we give you thanks, O God. Amen.

# Sunday 4: Gladly Breaking Bread

## WORSHIP SERVICE

### Welcome

### Land Acknowledgement

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

One: Jesus came to share the good news of God. He came to share in our joy and sorrows so we may know God more fully. Let us take a moment to share our joys and sorrows in community with God’s people.

(*The congregation is invited to share exciting or challenging events in their lives.*)

One: We light this candle for the good news we shared, the good news in hearts, and the good news that wherever you go God is with you.

### Call to Worship (based on Acts 2:43–47)

One: We are called to be the church.

**All: We come to learn from the lessons Jesus taught.**

One: Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

**All: We come in amazement of the wondrous things God is doing in the world.**

One: All who believed were together and had all things in common;

**All: We come with our own unique stories and histories, drawn together in God’s love.**

One: They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

**All: We come to learn ways we can care for God’s people and creation.**

One: Day by day, as they spent much time together in the Temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

**All: We come to share in fellowship as God’s people.**

One: And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**All: We come to worship God together in community.**

### Opening Prayer

Giver of life, as we worship together this morning, may our hearts be open to your guiding word. Through story, song, and silence teach us to live our lives in a spirit of generosity.
Amen.

### Hymn

“We Gather Here” (*Voices United* 469) or “Come Touch Our Hearts” (*More Voices* 12)

### Prayer of Confession

**All: Creator God, we live in a world of bounty—but we live in a society that teaches us to hoard resources often at the expense of others. Forgive us when we are blinded by our own wants and do not see the needs of others. Open our eyes to the needs of the world so we may give with generous hearts. Gracious God, hear our silent prayers as we confess those things that separate us from you and from each other…**

(*silence*)

### Words of Assurance

One: Hear the good news that God forgives you and God loves you. May you be comforted by God’s generous forgiveness so that you may live out a spirit of generosity in your life.

### Gospel Reading

The Widow’s Offering (Mark 12:41–44)

### Hymn

“We Are Pilgrims” (VU 595) or “When Hands Reach Out and Fingers Trace” (MV 136)

### Children’s Time

(*Prepare two or three boxes that you can see into that are the same size and full of items of different densities so they have different weights (e.g., rocks and feathers). Pass them around and ask the children which box has more in it. Have a conversation about how there are different ways of measuring things, such as volume, weight, etc. In the gospel reading today, Jesus showed there were different ways to measure how much we give. Some gifts that might not look like a lot are actually a very big deal, and some gifts that might look like a lot can actually mean very little. Pray that God might give us generous hearts when we give to others.*)

**or**

### Conversation Time

(*Invite worshippers to turn to a neighbour and discuss the following questions. What are some of that ways you give to the church or community? What gifts do you see in others in your community of faith that you would like to celebrate?*)

**or**

### Testimony Time

(*Invite someone from your community of faith to tell a story about what it means to live in the spirit of generosity in their lives, or a time when they have been blessed by the generosity of others.*)

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_CHILDREN’S_PROGRAM_3)*.*)

### The Lord’s Prayer

### Responsive Psalm

Psalm 146 (VU p. 868)

### Hymn

“Spirit, Open My Heart” (MV 79) or “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace” (VU 684)

### New Testament Lesson

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11)

### Message

Gladly Breaking Bread (*See* [*below*](#_MESSAGE_3)*.*)

### Offering Our Gifts

Let us respond to the gifts God has given us with our offering.

### Offering Song

“In Gratitude and Humble Trust” (VU 544) or “What Can I Do?” (MV 191)

### Offering Prayer

One: Generous God, you have given us so many wonderful gifts. May we be inspired by your generosity to serve your people and your Creation. Amen.

### Prayers of the People

*Sung refrain:* “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

One: God, we give you thanks for all the joys in our lives…

(*silence and/or sharing; a candle is lit*)

*Sung refrain:* “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

One: In the midst of joy, we also experience sorrow…

(*silence and/or sharing; a candle is lit*)

*Sung refrain:* “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

One: We pray for all those suffering from physical or mental illness…

(*silence and/or sharing; a candle is lit*)

*Sung refrain:* “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

One: We pray for people affected by natural and human-caused disasters…

(*silence and/or sharing; a candle is lit*)

*Sung refrain:* “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

One: We pray for those suffering from political violence and unrest…

(*silence and/or sharing; a candle is lit*)

*Sung refrain:* “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

One: We pray for the healing of your Creation and give thanks for all those caring for the earth…

(*silence and/or sharing; a candle is lit*)

*Sung refrain:* “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” (VU 400)

One: We pray for your church and your people wherever they gather…

(*silence and/or sharing; a candle is lit*)

One: God, hear our prayers, both spoken and unspoken, and in your love answer. Amen.

### Hymn

“Go, Make a Diff’rence” (MV 209) or “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ” (VU 468)

### Sending Out and Blessing

One: Go out into the world this week living out a spirit of generosity, and may you be open to and blessed by the generosity of others. Amen.

### Choral Closing

“May the God of Hope Go with Us” (VU 424) v. 2 or “Go to the World” (VU 420) v. 1

## MESSAGE: GLADLY BREAKING BREAD

Over the past few weeks, we’ve been exploring what it means to be “called to be the church” by looking back at some stories from the Early Church and the description of the Early Church given to us in Acts 2. We’ve noted how that community began in a place of awe and wonder, was drawn together in community, and was challenged to expand their sense of who they were and who they were responsible for.

This week, we observe how that community broke bread together, with glad and generous hearts, and consider how we might be called to do the same. Acts 2 shows us a picture of the Early Church. “Day by day,” it reads in verse 46, “as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.”

Breaking bread, of course, is a description of a community eating together and sharing a meal, but by extension it’s also a symbol of all the resources we share and the discerning we do about our own needs and what we can give. When we break bread, we set aside some for us and some to share. Where we break that bread is a matter of discernment—a matter of faith.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira may seem like an odd choice when talking about giving generously and sharing resources. Don’t worry. The point of this message is not that if you don’t give enough offering this morning, God will strike you down. This story is often told with the idea that God, either working through Peter or by Godself, caused the death of Ananias and Sapphira. But the scripture simply says that they fell down and died.

It may be that God or Peter struck down Ananias and Sapphira, or it may be that the stress of hiding the wealth they were hoarding and the shame of being found out as hypocrites was enough to cause their hearts to fail. Either way, it seems that it was their lack of generosity, honesty, and trust that led to their demise.

So, what does this tell us about living glad and generous lives? If Ananias and Sapphira were more generous, would they have met the same end? If they were able to give what they could, gladly, would the story have played out differently?

We can’t know whether or not giving all of their money to the community would have spared their lives, but it may have changed the way they lived their final moments. If they had generously given all that they had, if they had gladly invested in their community until their very last days—no matter when that may have been—they would have been surrounded by a community that supported them in their final moments, returning gratitude and surrounding them with joy. Instead, their dishonesty led them to be isolated from their community.

Giving gladly and generously is not about how much you give, but about the manner in which you give it. The widow in our gospel lesson this morning is proof of that. She was only able to give two small copper coins, but she gave gladly and generously of what she had.

The first step to giving gladly and generously is evaluating what you have and discerning what you need.

I would like to share with you this morning a story of a man who was actively aware of his needs, and it allowed him to be a joyful and generous giver.

This man was a little rough around the edges. He had lived a hard life and was seen as a little different by people in his community. He regularly visited his old Cub leader and he was hired to cut the Cub leader’s lawn. He never came quite when he was expected, but the arrangement worked out well for both of them.

One week, when he came to mow the lawn, he brought a loaf of bread with him. Someone had given it to him knowing that he did not have a lot of extra income. The man knew he would not be able to eat the whole loaf of bread, so he brought it to his old Cub leader, who lived with his wife and two grandchildren and often had visitors stop by for lunch.

His offering was a simple loaf of bread that probably only cost a couple of dollars, but the thought and care represented in the gift made it invaluable.

It is important for us to regularly take a step back and evaluate what we are giving to the church. It is just as important to take stock of the spirit with which we are serving God’s people.

Are you at the church so often that you are feeling burnt out and becoming frustrated with all your volunteer positions? Or do you have more free time than you used to and could gladly offer more time to the volunteer work of the church?

Are you struggling to make ends meet and need to re-valuate your financial givings? Or have you not changed the amount you have given in many years and feel able to increase your givings?

Maybe you have a unique skill you enjoy, like knitting or crocheting, that you could use to knit prayer shawls or warm winter clothing for people in need.

Maybe you have the technical skills required to easily and joyfully update the church computer, or the ability to gladly perform regular maintenance on the building.

Maybe you have a passion for music through which you can praise God in worship.

We are all blessed by the unique skills, abilities, and resources that enrich our community of faith when they are offered with a glad and generous heart.

Breaking bread gladly—discerning what we need and what we can give—is part of what it means to be “called to be the church.” When we all give generously of our time, talent, and treasure, we become the kind of community of faith exemplified by the Early Church that we read about in Acts.

What might you be called to give today?

## CHILDREN’S PROGRAM

### Opening Prayer

God, we gather today to learn more about the stories of Jesus.
Teach us to be gracious givers,
so we can share what we have with others. Amen.

### Retell the Story

(*Retell the story of the Widow’s Offering, found in Mark 12:41–44, by either reading the story from a children’s Bible, or by having the children act out the story together, or by asking questions about the scripture read in church.*)

### Sample Questions

* In this story, who gave more money, the rich people or the poor widow?
* Why did Jesus say that the poor widow gave more than the rich people?
* What’s a little gift you could give someone that might mean an awful lot?

### Activity Options

#### Science Activity: Making Bread Together

##### Materials

1 cup + 2 tablespoons warm water, 1/3 cup vegetable oil, 2 tablespoons active dry yeast, 1/4 cup sugar, 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, 1 egg, 3 1/2 cups bread flour.

Instructions: Preheat oven to 400°F. In a mixer bowl combine the water, oil, yeast, and sugar. Allow to rest for 15 minutes. Then mix in the salt, egg, and flour, using a dough hook on your mixer if available. Knead the dough with the dough hook or by hand until the dough is soft and smooth. Form dough into 12 balls and place them in a greased 9x13 inch pan. Allow to rest for 10 minutes. Bake for 10 minutes at 400°F or until golden brown.

Note: Invite the children to participate in the baking as much as their proficiency and safety will allow. If the recipe takes longer than your program allows, you may wish to make a batch ahead of time for the children to enjoy at the end of your time together.

##### Discuss

Who does most of the cooking in your house? Do you help? Have you ever made a special meal or snack for someone? How do you feel when you help cook for someone? There is enough food in our world to make sure no one goes hungry, and yet there are still people who don’t have enough to eat. Why is that? What do you think God wants us to do, to make sure no one goes hungry?

#### Art Activity: Something from Nothing

##### Materials

Gather up a whole pile of recyclable materials, things like yogurt tubs, paper towel tubes, newspaper, wire. Solicit material from congregation members and families the week before. Provide a few types of adhesives and joining materials (e.g., duct tape, glue gun, string, elastics).

##### Instructions

Invite the children to make something useful out of the materials. If they are stuck for ideas, suggest making an instrument, a boat, or a decoration for the church. See what amazing inventions the children can create!

##### Discuss

Part of giving generously is taking care of the earth and getting the most that we can out of the resources we have. What are some ways you can reduce, reuse, and recycle more in your daily living? How might that help you share more with others?

#### Food Activity: Stone Soup

##### Storytelling

Share the story of [Stone Soup](https://foodgrainsbank.ca/resources/story-stone-soup/) as found on the Canadian Foodgrains Bank website.

##### Discuss

Was the stone in the story magical? How did it work to create such a yummy soup? It isn’t always easy to share what we have with others, but it sure feels good when other people share with us. When we all pitch in what we have, even if it’s only a little, we can create something wonderful. What’s something special you have to share with the people around you?

##### Instructions

Create a poster with a picture of a big soup pot and all the things we have to share with the people in our community.

#### Action Activity: Which Is More?

##### Materials

Provide a number of different items that can be used for measuring, e.g., a bathroom or kitchen scale, some measuring tapes, a bucket or tub full of water, a watch or timer on your phone. Print enough Which Is More? Worksheets (see [below](#_Which_Is_More?)) for each child or one for each pair.

##### Instructions

Work together to fill out the Which Is More? Worksheet with your estimates and measurements.

##### Discuss

It is not always easy to tell which is more. The way we measure things is not always the way in which God measures things. Something that looks small and insignificant to us can sometimes be very important and meaningful to God. Something we think is big and important can sometimes be very small in the eyes of God. How might we learn to see things and measure their importance in the way that God does?

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for all that you have given us. Help us to take some of what we have and share with others.

(*Invite each child to share about something that they have to share with others, or someone they know who is in need. You may pass around a sharing stone or other significant object to signify whose turn it is to pray. Praying in silence and/or passing the object without sharing is always an option*.)

For all that we have and all we’re able to give, we give you thanks, O God. Amen.

## Which Is More? Worksheet

Which is farther: the distance from our program room to the front door, or the distance from our program room to the sanctuary? Use a tape measure or count the number of steps.

My guess:

My measurements:

My conclusion:

Which is heavier: 10 hymn books, or 8 Bibles? Use a bathroom scale or kitchen scale.

My guess:

My measurements:

My conclusion:

Which takes up more space (volume): my leader’s foot, or my leader’s hand? Use a bucket or tub of water, and mark how much water is displaced.

My guess:

My measurements:

My conclusion:

Which takes more time: walking around the outside of our church, or singing the words to a favourite song that we know? Use a watch or a timer on your phone.

My guess:

My measurements:

My conclusion:

# Sunday 5: Praising God

## WORSHIP SERVICE

### Welcome

### Land Acknowledgement

### Lighting of the Christ Candle

One: Jesus came to share the good news of God. He came to share in our joys and sorrows so we may know God more fully. Let us take a moment to share our joys and sorrows in community with God’s people.

(*The congregation is invited to share exciting or challenging events in their lives*.)

One: We light this candle for the good news we shared, the good news in our hearts, and the good news that wherever you go God is with you.

### Call to Worship (based on Acts 2:43–47)

One: We are called to be the church.

**All: We come to learn from the lessons Jesus taught.**

One: Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

**All: We come in amazement of the wondrous things God is doing in the world.**

One: All who believed were together and had all things in common.

**All: We come with our own unique stories and histories, drawn together in God’s love.**

One: They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

**All: We come to learn ways we can care for God’s people and Creation.**

One: Day by day, as they spent much time together in the Temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

**All: We come to share in fellowship as God’s people.**

One: And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**All: We come to worship God together in community.**

### Opening Prayer

Awesome and wonderful God, we bring our praises before you this day. Receive our adoration, let our words be full of truth, and take away any reticence or fear we have about expressing our love for you and your church. Let our worship be an offering to you this day. Amen.

### Hymn

“It’s a Song of Praise to the Maker” (*More Voices* 30) or “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (*Voices United* 220)

### Prayer of Confession

**All: Generous maker, merciful Saviour, you are worthy of all our praise. Yet sometimes, Lord, we are tongue-tied and shy, reticent to give voice to our experience of the Holy. Forgive us, God, when we have hidden the light of your love under a basket. Have mercy on us for the times when we have left things unsaid that needed to be spoken. Gracious God, hear our silent prayers as we confess those things that separate us from you and from each other…**

(*silence*)

### Words of Assurance

One: God is merciful and loving. When we bring our shortcomings to the foot of the cross, we can be assured of our forgiveness. Know that God’s love and mercy are yours. Go and sin no more.

### Gospel Lesson

Jesus Sends the Seventy Helpers (Luke 10:1–9)

### Hymn

“I Love to Tell the Story” (VU 343) or “Ask Me What Great Thing I Know” (VU 338) or “I’m Gonna Shout, Shout” (MV 183)

### Children’s Time

(*With the children, think of someone you know who isn’t at church this morning, someone to whom you’d like to send a message. What would that message be? Brainstorm all the different ways you could send that person the message. Share how God wants to send everyone a message—a message of God’s love and acceptance—and often uses people like you and me to be the messenger.*)

**or**

### Conversation Time

(*Invite worshippers to turn to a neighbour and discuss the following questions. How do you give expression or voice to your love of God? Do the people around you know about your love of God? If so, how? What makes the greater impression on people, our actions or our words?*)

**or**

### Testimony Time

(*Invite someone from your community of faith to tell a story about how they express their love of God. How does their love of God come out*?)

### Children’s Program

(*See* [*below*](#_CHILDREN’S_PROGRAM_4)*.*)

### The Lord’s Prayer

### Responsive Psalm

Psalm 148 (VU p. 871)

### Hymn

“Dance with the Spirit” (MV 156) or “Oh a Song Must Rise” (MV 142)

### New Testament Lesson

Pentecost (Acts 2:1–13)

### Message

Praising God (*See* [*below*](#_MESSAGE_4)*.*)

### Offering Our Gifts

### Offering Song

“In Gratitude and Humble Trust” (VU 544) or “What Can I Do?” (MV 191)

### Offering Prayer

One: Holy and generous God, accept these gifts that they might be your hands and feet in the world. Accept our lives that we might give voice to your love for all Creation. Amen.

### Prayers of the People

One: Glorious God, in the outpouring of your Spirit, we affirm that you have not left us alone. You have called us to be the church—your people, guided by that Spirit to live lives of abundance and generosity. For that, we give you thanks and praise.

We give thanks for whose we are—children of the living God.
We declare our identity as those claimed by Christ.
We anticipate the kind of community we will become—a church fully alive in the Spirit.

As we heed your call in our lives, we give thanks and glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

Gracious God, give us gentle hearts to walk with those who are hurting—the sick, the sad, and the lonely. Help us speak words of comfort and be a loving presence to the people around us.

Redeeming Saviour, give us courage to stand up to injustice, to use our power and privilege to challenge oppression, to offer grace and mercy to those who have wronged us.

Eternal Spirit, crack open our hesitancy to extend generosity to others. Break through our fears and dismantle our prejudices. Make us responsive to your presence in our lives.

Into this time of silence, O Lord, we offer up to you all those people and situations that lie close to our hearts. Hear our prayers, O God, and in your love answer…

(*silence*)

Glory to God, from generation to generation, across differences and localities, in the church and through the Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

### Hymn

“Praise the Lord with the Sound of Trumpet” (VU 245) or “Deep in Our Hearts” (MV 154)

### Sending Out and Blessing

### Choral Closing

“May the God of Hope Go with Us” (VU 424) verse 2 or “Go to the World” (VU 420) verse 1

## MESSAGE: PRAISING GOD

Our five-week exploration of what it means to be “called to be the church” ends today. Over the past four weeks we’ve been looking to the Early Church as our example of what it means to be the kind of church community God is calling us to be. Starting from a place of awe and wonder, we noted how God’s call knits people together in community, expands our sense of that community, and challenges us to gladly break bread and generously share our resources.

Today we end our exploration by noting how the Early Church community praised God in all they did. Acts 2:47 describes the Early Church as constantly “praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

I invite you to take a deep breath. Breathe in deeply. Draw all the life-giving air into your lungs that you can. As you do so, imagine what is happening within you—how oxygen is passing into your blood stream, how that enriched blood courses through you to nourish all parts of your being. Consider all that is going on within you as you draw breath into your self.

And now take another deep breath…and hold it. Keep holding. What do you notice? Tension? Pressure? If you held your breath for too long, we could be in for some serious consequences. So let go. Exhale!

Just as drawing breath into us is important and the work of that breath within us is important, so, too, is it important to let that breath out, to exhale, to maintain an equilibrium between in and out, in order for us to be healthy.

Likewise, when we look at the example of the Early Church, we realize that it’s important to take in, notice, and observe with awe and wonder the amazing works of God around us (we talked about this in our first week together). It’s important to let those mighty actions work on us, calling us into deeper community, broadening our imaginations, and moving us toward generosity (we talked about those things over the past few weeks as well). But it’s also important to express outwardly, to put out into the world our sense of what God is doing within us by praising God, proclaiming God’s goodness, and witnessing to others what God has done for us.

“Shout, sister, shout!” is the cry of the old gospel singer. “Tell the whole world what it’s all about.”

“How can I keep from singing your praise?” asks the contemporary worship singer. “How can I ever say enough? How amazing is your love!”

“O for a thousand tongues to sing,” pleads the hymn writer, “my great redeemer’s praise.”

When the Holy Spirit came upon the Early Church at Pentecost, God gave the believers the ability to speak in new languages. People from all corners of the known world at the time asked, “How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native languages?”

This wasn’t some party trick meant to impress onlookers. It wasn’t meant to pad a resume or beef up a college application. The Holy Spirit empowered the believers in this way because the glory of God needs to be expressed. Our praise of God needs to be expressed and heard.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, which is a summary of Christian faith from our Presbyterian and Reformed roots, begins by inquiring about the chief aim of humanity. What are we meant for? For what are we designed? It describes our chief aim as being twofold—to glorify God and to enjoy God forever.

So let’s take a few moments to give voice to these two aims. Turn to a neighbour and share a quick story about where you experience the glory of God. What lately has caused you to say, “Wow, God, thank you”? Where have you witnessed God at work in the world around you?

(*Allow a few minutes for conversations among members, or if you prefer, arrange to have a person or two share a story from the front.*)

And now, secondly, turn to a new neighbour and have another conversation. What is it you enjoy about your community of faith? What do you enjoy about being a follower of Jesus? Turn to a new neighbour and give voice to the joy you find in your Christian calling.

(*Again, allow a few minutes for conversation, or if you prefer, arrange to have a person or two share from the front.*)

We are “called to be the church.” That means we notice, take in, and are aware of the presence of God and the Holy Spirit working among us. We are shaped and formed by that work into a community with imagination and joyful generosity. It means we give voice and outward expression—we proclaim the goodness of God for others to hear and take in.

This is the breath of life. In and out and in again. We are called to be a community, alive and living in Christ. We are “called to be the church.” Thanks be to God.

Amen.

## CHILDREN’S PROGRAM

### Opening Prayer

God, we gather today to learn more about the stories of Jesus.
Help us express the things that we feel.
Help us to share your good news with others. Amen.

### Retell the Story

(*Retell the story of Jesus Sending the Seventy Helpers, found in Luke 10:1‒9, by either reading from a children’s Bible, or by having the children act out the story together, or by asking questions about the scripture read in church.*)

### Sample Questions

* What is a harvest? Were Jesus’ helpers working on a real harvest?
* What kinds of things did Jesus want his helpers to do?
* Jesus sent out a lot of helpers. Why do you think he sent them in pairs?
* Why did he tell them to take so little with them?
* Why would the helpers tell people, “The kingdom of God has come near to you”?

### Activity Options

#### Decoding Activity: Sharing Good News

##### Materials

Pens or pencils, copies of the Sharing Good News Worksheet (see [below](#_Sharing_Good_News); print one sheet for each child).

##### Instructions

Invite the children to decipher the hidden message using the Answer Key provided. If time allows, encourage the children to write and share their own encrypted messages using the same Answer Key (or creating their own).

##### Discuss

Jesus sent the Seventy Helpers to share the good news of God’s love and calls on us to do the same. Yet, sometimes, even people who love Jesus hide God’s message away. Why do people do that? What keeps people from talking about God more freely? When is it a good time to share God’s good news, and when is it a time to stay quiet? How do we know the difference?

#### Art Activity: Affirmation Notes

##### Materials

Provide construction paper or cardstock, scissors, markers, pens, crayons, etc.

##### Instructions

Invite the children to create beautiful affirmation cards, expressing things they appreciate about people in their church community. Leaders might need to help with names, spelling, and so on. An affirmation message might say something like, “Thank you for being so kind to me,” or “I like how you remember my birthday,” or “You sing beautifully.” Encourage the children to decorate their note, perhaps by cutting the paper into a fancy shape, or adding stickers and drawings. At the end of worship, help the children to deliver their notes to the people in your church community. Try to think not only of people who are easy to affirm, but people who might need some encouragement. If children finish their note early, invite them to make another note for God, which can be placed on the Communion Table after worship.

##### Discuss

As a church community, we are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus. What does that mean? Could part of it include telling people where you see Jesus in their lives? How does it feel when people affirm you and say good things about you? How does it feel to tell someone they’re special?

#### Food Activity: Find the Right Words

##### Materials

Blindfolds; small cups with foods with different textures and tastes; marker; and flipchart.

##### Instructions

Today, we are doing a taste test of sorts. When you are ready, blindfold each child so they cannot see the food you place in front of them. Prepare enough servings, so that there are four or five rounds, with each child having a little serving to themselves. For each round, place a serving in front of each child and invite them to taste it. Ask them to take turns describing what they taste, without naming the food they think it is. Record the words they use and then gather any guesses as to what it is. You can either reveal the right answer after each round, or save it all until the end.

##### Discuss

Finding the right words to describe something can be tricky and takes practice. We want people to know what it is we’ve experienced, but communicating our experience to others is hard. If this is true with the foods we taste, it is especially true of our experiences of God. What are some of the words we use to communicate our experience of God to others? Do all these words make sense to people, or just to us? What is important to remember when speaking about God to others?

#### Action Activity: Partner Up

##### Materials

Old neck ties; hula hoops, broomsticks, recycle bins, and other materials that can be used as part of an obstacle course.

##### Instructions

Separate the children into pairs and have them link up like a three-legged or two-headed monster. Depending on the age and comfort level of the children, you might use an old neck tie to join them at the leg, or simply invite them to hold hands or grab onto a shared neck-tie. However you join them together, invite them to perform a number of silly tasks, e.g., find their way through an obstacle course, fit through a hula hoop, act out a Bible story. Whatever they do, they have to do as a pair. To make it more difficult, you can add challenges such as blindfolding one of each pair, or taking away the ability to talk. If you’d like, you can make it a race, or work together until every pair succeeds.

##### Discuss

Jesus sent his helpers out in pairs. Sometimes this was probably very helpful, but other times it might have been challenging, too. Are you someone who likes to tackle challenges on your own, or in a team? Why do you think God wants us to come together as a community to serve our world? What is helpful about that, and what is challenging?

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for the good news of your love. Help us to share that good news with others.

(*Invite each child to share about something amazing concerning God and/or their church community. You may pass around a sharing stone or other significant object to signify whose turn it is to pray. Praying in silence and/or passing the object without sharing is always an option.*)

Holy God, in what we say and what we do, we proclaim that you are so very good to us. We give you praise, O God. Amen.

## Sharing Good News Worksheet

Decipher the hidden message using the Answer Key provided below.

+ \ m o y q w j 3 ^ 3 > w 3 j

\ 8 @ # 3 ^ m q m 8 z + 3 x 3 $

Answer Key:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A = 8 | J = g | S = @ |
| B = & | K = o | T = + |
| C = # | L = / | U = $ |
| D = j | M = ^ | V = ? |
| E = m | N = q | W = < |
| F = > | O = 3 | X = % |
| G = w | P = e | Y = x |
| H = \ | Q = ] | Z = a |
| I = y | R = z |  |

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What message do you feel called to share?