# advent/white gift sunday/mission and service

## Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy Lifts Up Mission and Service Projects

The following Advent wreath liturgy (based on year C of the Revised Common Lectionary) is designed to help integrate the worshipping life and work of the church. Each week in Advent is linked to a **Mission and Service** initiative or project. Congregations are encouraged to use the corresponding **Minute for Mission** during an appropriate spot in worship (before or during the offering) or to print it in their order of service. Feel free to adapt and change the liturgy to fit your community and context.

# Additional suggestions for this liturgy

* Create a graffiti wall somewhere prominent in your church by writing the words “Hope burns in...” on a large sheet of mural paper or canvas. Invite the congregation members, before the service and throughout the week, to write on the wall the names of places where they experience hope. Add a new graffiti wall for each week of Advent (i.e., “Peace burns in…,” “Joy burns in…,” and “Love burns in…). On Christmas Eve incorporate the information gathered on the wall into a prayer of thanksgiving before lighting the Christ candle.
* Provide the Sunday school or members of the congregation with cameras and ask them to take photos (at least a week before the Sunday) of places in their community in need of hope and places where they see hope. Repeat for each week of Advent requesting photos that reflect the themes of peace, joy, and love respectively. Use these photos as slides when *voice two* (indicated by *italic font*) speaks in the liturgy.
* Invite the people reading the liturgy and lighting the Advent candles to personalize the liturgy by adding where they experience hope, peace, joy, and love (in sections marked by brackets).
* If your congregation is comfortable with “popcorn style” prayer, invite the liturgist to allow for silence during the time marked by brackets and encourage the congregation members to call out places where they experience hope, peace, joy, and love.
* If your congregation has a Christmas tree, create paper ornaments that symbolize hope, peace, joy, and love for each week and invite congregants to write or draw a picture of where they experience these things (cut-out paper ornaments might symbolize a candle for hope, a dove for peace, a star for joy, and a heart for love). The ornaments could be collected with the offering and hung by members of the congregation (perhaps children), or could be brought up and hung by congregants during an appropriate time in the service (for example, during the Children’s Time or the offering) or after the service. If your congregation does not have a Christmas tree, the ornaments can be hung from string (like bunting) somewhere visible in the church.

# Advent 1: Hope

## Scripture

Jeremiah 33:14–16; Psalm 25:1–10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13; Luke 21:25–36

## Candle Lighting Liturgy

Voice 1: A candle of hope burns…

*Voice 2: through longing, doubt, and despair,*

*through earthquakes, famine, and drought.*

**All: Through it all,**

**God is with us;**

**there is always a spark of hope.**

Voice 1: Hope burns…

*Voice 2: in* [*name local situations and places where hope is being shared through actions*]*;*

Voice 1: in Haiti, in the Karl Lévêque Cultural Centre, and the Methodist Church in Haiti.

**All: In every place,**

**God calls us,**

**to share and reflect the Lights of Lights**

*Voice 2: that is and is to come;*

Voice 1: our hope in a despairing world.

## Song

“Hope Shines as the Solitary Star” (*More Voices* 220)

## Minute for Mission

Hope is coming to life from the rubble of the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010. The Rev. Edzaire Paul, Director of Education for the Methodist Church of Haiti, says, “Thank you” to the people of The United Church of Canada who supported the work of rebuilding several of their schools. His message to us is “Thank you. Thank you for all the support you are giving. Please be patient. Rome was not built in a day. Our work of rebuilding schools will take a while. Please stay with us on this. Our children are the most important things that we Haitians have, and you are helping us to look after them. So we say a very big thank you.”

Jim Hodgson, the United Church staff person who coordinates work with partners in the Caribbean, Central America, and Colombia, reported in November 2010 that “despite the collective trauma of great loss—300,000 lives in the January 12 earthquake, more than one million people living in tents, a cholera outbreak that has killed at least 1,500 and threatens tens of thousands more—I see vast numbers of strong and hopeful people who are working hard to rebuild their communities.”

Haitian families are holding hope and working hard through many challenges to rebuild their lives and their communities. With our prayers and support they have accomplished great things. Eleven schools and several churches have been built, a new printing press is now printing books for schools across the area, and small-scale farmers are using conservation cultivation methods to produce more food sustainably.

Haiti’s people, including the children, the farmers, and the teachers, are building strong communities. They know they are not alone. United Church members contributed $3.5 million to the immediate relief response and reconstruction. Through Mission and Service our partnership is fulfilling the long-term hopes of the people of Haiti for schools, health, food, and democracy. The United Church of Canada has worked with the Methodist Church of Haiti and the Karl Lévêque Cultural Centre since 1960 and will continue to work together toward a hope-fulfilling future.

Voice 1: Ministries and programs enabled by our gifts for Mission and Service is the United Church’s way of living out our creed:

**All:** **We celebrate God’s presence,**

**we love and serve others,**

**we seek justice,**

**and we resist evil.**

Voice 1: Every gift for Mission and Service is used wisely,

helps to transform lives,

and provides healing and hope to thousands around the world.

**All:** **Thanks be to God!**

# Advent 2: Peace

## Scripture

Malachi 3:1–9; Psalm 126; Philemon 1:8–11; Luke 8:1–6

## Candle Lighting Liturgy

Voice 1: A candle of peace burns…

*Voice 2: through tensions, tears, and wars,*

*through steep hills, rough paths, and deep valleys.*

**All: Through it all,**

**God is with us;**

**there is always a spark of peace.**

Voice 1: Peace burns…

*Voice 2: in* [*name the actions of local peacekeepers*]*;*

Voice 1: in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Église du Christ au Congo.

**All: In every place,**

**God calls us,**

**to share and reflect the Lights of Lights**

*Voice 2: that is and is to come;*

Voice 1: our peacekeeper in a warring world.

## Song

“*Peace* Shines as the Solitary Star” (*More Voices* 220)

## Minute for Mission

“Are you brave enough for peace?” sings Chris Williamson in her song “We the People.” Those who have met her, especially members of Lindsay Presbytery where she has visited, would agree that Mama Nzeba (pronounced *in zee bah*) is brave enough for peace. The Rev. Nzeba Kalombo Berthe, known to many as Mama Nzeba, works for her church, Église du Christ au Congo, to support women and children affected by the war and ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Our churches, The United Church of Canada and Église du Christ au Congo, have worked together since 1974 during difficult times. Mama Nzeba says that walking this path together is “a sign of solidarity of the children of God.”

The Congo is emerging from a five-year war that killed 5.4 million people and involved eight African countries and 25 armed groups. Peace is not the absence of war. Peace can mean a home, enough food, medical care, an education, safety. How would you define peace?

With support from United Church of Canada Mission and Service, Église du Christ au Congo runs several clinics offering basic community health care including pre- and post-natal care. Most clinics must also deal with the particular needs of women and young girls who have been the victims of sexual violence. Through our support, peace and gender justice initiatives are changing lives in this war-torn country. Women’s leadership is emerging throughout the church. Microcredit systems are creating employment for women. Children are learning about and supporting gender equality. Mama Nzeba is enabling women and children affected by war to be brave enough for peace.

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# Advent 3: Joy and White Gift Sunday

If your congregation celebrates White Gift Sunday, consider preparing gifts for a Mission and Service supported ministry/outreach program in your community and writing a Minute for Mission—a story of transformation in people’s lives—based on your local context. If you would like to give gifts for Mission and Service, Christmas offering envelopes can be ordered (free of charge) through the UCRD: [www.ucrdstore.ca/catalogsearch/result/?q=M%26S+christmas+envelopes](http://www.ucrdstore.ca/catalogsearch/result/?q=M%26S+christmas+envelopes).

Suggestions for receiving the offering:

* Collect all of the white gifts in baskets at the back of the church and have people bring them up with the offering. In the prayer of dedication include the weekly offering and the offering of the white gifts for God’s mission in the world.
* Place the offering plates at the front of the church and have people come forward to give their offering and to present their gifts.

To find community and social justice ministries in your area:

* visit [www.united-church.ca/contact/community](http://www.united-church.ca/contact/community)
* refer to pages 41–51 of *The United Church of Canada Year Book*
* speak to the mission strategist for your Conference or presbytery

## Scripture

Zephaniah 3:14–20; Isaiah 12:2–6; Philippians 4:4–13; Luke 3:7–18

## Candle Lighting Liturgy

Voice 1: A candle of joy burns…

*Voice 2: through weakness, anxiety, and fear,*

*through oppression, discrimination, and strife.*

**All: Through it all,**

**God is with us;**

**there is always a spark of joy.**

Voice 1: Joy burns…

*Voice 2: in* [*name local situations and places were joy is being shared/outcasts are being welcomed or share the joy of the gifts being given today*]*,*

Voice 1: in the Oak Table community ministry in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**All: In every place,**

**God calls us,**

**to share and reflect the Lights of Lights**

Voice 2: *that is and is to come;*

Voice 1: our joy in a distressing world.

## Song

“*Joy* Shines as the Solitary Star” (*More Voices* 220)

## Minute for Mission

A candle of joy does indeed burn through weakness, anxiety, and fear, through oppression, discrimination, and strife. The stigma of mental illness excludes people from community. Oak Table community ministry in Augustine United Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, joyfully invites people into community. It is a place where people struggling with issues such as mental illness, addictions, and homelessness can find pastoral care, some food, and assistance with solving the problems they are facing. St Augustine United Church started this outreach program in 1981. Today, Oak Table is a Mission and Service supported community ministry serving up to 60 people daily.

Ed had been homeless for about seven years. His life as a husband, father, and truck driver fell apart because of depression, alcohol, childhood trauma, and a marriage breakup. In the midst of the turmoil, Ed discovered Oak Table community ministry. He became a “street dad” to kids who were homeless. After participating in a program on mental health issues and homelessness, Ed moved into his own apartment and is looking into becoming an Oak Table volunteer. Ed’s transformation is a source of great joy.

**Hear the joy in these words from a participant in the art program at Oak Table: “Oak Table changed my life. I do art now, I participate in art events, and I learned to play guitar during the course at Oak Table.”**

**The Oak Table community ministry is creating community, transforming lives, and bringing joy.**

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# Advent 4: Love

## Scripture

Micah 5:2–4; Psalm 80:1–7; Hebrews 10:5–10; Luke 1: 39–55

## Candle Lighting Liturgy

Voice 1: A candle of love burns…

*Voice 2: through loneliness, isolation, and pride*

*through hunger, silence, and social injustice.*

**All: Through it all,**

**God is with us;**

**there is always a spark of love.**

Voice 1: Love burns…

*Voice 2: in* [*name local situations where love is shown through action*]*,*

Voice 1: in First United Church in the Downtown Eastside Vancouver, British Columbia.

**All: In every place,**

**God calls us,**

**to share and reflect the Lights of Lights**

Voice 2: *that is and is to come;*

Voice 1: our love in a condemning world.

## Song

“*Love* Shines as the Solitary Star” (*More Voices* 220)

## Minute for Mission

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42). Elizabeth’s prayerful words lift Mary from loneliness and isolation and connect her with community. “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke1:46*b*). These words from Mary’s song speak of deep love. A voiceless young woman speaks with a pure heart full of love. Mary is changed by blessing and by love.

Mary’s song goes on to speak of a world turned upside down because of blessing. At First United Church in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, British Columbia, blessings are shared through words, prayers, food, service, shelter, companionship, advocacy, and foot-care. For over a decade now, on weekday mornings, people are welcomed into a quiet space in the southwest corner of the sanctuary where 12 chairs are placed in a circle. Many people come in from life on the streets or shelters. Church volunteers offer steel bowls of warm water mixed with Epsom salts and tea tree oil for soaking the people’s feet. They offer conversation, nail clippers, and clean socks. People relax and share conversation. The soothing Christian ritual of foot-washing and practical self-care come together in an act of blessing and love.

This ministry of blessing is carried out by all members of the community to all members of the community. Celebrating over 125 years of ministry, First United has experienced transformation many times because of their response to God’s mission. In a recent report, First United says that the 125 years “have taught us we need each other in order to be fully human—each with needs to be met and with gifts to give.”

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