



Behold I Make All Things New Voici je fais toutes choses nouvelles

Worship Service

To Accompany Consideration of Remits
From the 42nd General Council

Prepared by General Council Commissioners:
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Introduction: You may use this introduction at the first, or at any of your sessions.

In this time, in the life of The United Church of Canada, and in this gathering of _____
Presbytery/Pastoral Charge here and now, we are asked to do a new thing.

We are meeting to consider Remits that will change our church.

Maybe we agree with these Remits; maybe we disagree. Maybe we are excited, or anxious, or both.

Whether or not these particular Remits pass, change is on the way.

We are asked to let go of some things -- maybe we are happy to leave them behind, or maybe they are things we have cherished.

But as we approach this work, we begin with worship. Because whatever we think about these proposed changes, we need to be nourished for this work, and rooted and grounded in God.

Devotional #1

(Suggested symbol: a rock to symbolize the destruction of the temple)



Call to Worship:

God is good ... **All the time.**

All the time ... God is good.

God is with us in the ancient paths of the stars and the solid ground under our feet --

And God springs forth in each new morning and dances in endless possibilities.

Wherever we are and wherever we go, **God is with us.**

Centering Song: Behold, Behold I Make All Things New (#115, *More Voices*)

Reflection:

Let us hear these words of scripture - written long ago for people dreaming dreams of home:

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18-19)

(Silence)

We acknowledge that even when we want to do something new, it's not easy; not easy at all. Even when we are more than ready to get on with the change, there may still be a part of us that is sad.

Let us hear these words of scripture - written long ago by someone trying to live after being brought against their will, to a strange place:

“By the rivers of Babylon - there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps.” (Psalm 137: 1-2)

I wonder how many of us are feeling like that when we consider these proposed changes to this United Church of ours.

(Silence)

As we begin this journey may we know that we are not alone -- that our foremothers and fathers have gone this way before -- and that God always walks with us.

Read Psalm 137 (p.858-859, *Voices United* -- either the responsive, or the sung version)

At the time of the writing of Psalm 137, and the time of Isaiah, the people felt as though everything had changed, and it had. Assyria had conquered their country, and they were in captivity -- again!

The way they worshiped had been turned upside down. The temple, the place where they had encountered God, was in ruins. What would they do? Some gave up on God altogether. Some could not imagine how to be God's people in a new way.

And yet -- it was this very thing that called forth from them the best of who they were.

They began to worship in local synagogues, in family clusters at Sabbath time, they began to write down their stories -- they cut to the core of their beliefs and expressed those in new ways. And this reordering became what we know today as the heart of Judaism. This never would have happened, had the temple not been destroyed.

And so as we consider these Remits, we are looking at a different future for our church, no matter how we vote. And as we try to sing a new song in a strange land -- we are in good company.

Prayer: Let us pray:

Singer God, you hear our songs of sadness and you sing them with us -- and yet, your voice soars above and beneath and through, calling forth harmonies that we have yet to discover -- melodies our ears are untrained to hear.

Sing with us and sing for us and help us to hear the new song, the new thing you are about to do.
Amen.

Song: All is made New by Curtis Tufts (Tune: #283, *Voices United*)
(The words are included at the end of this document.)

Commissioning:

May the echoes of our worship stay with us as we move into our work.

May we be faithful in what we do, knowing God is with us.

Note to Leaders: After the discussion and before the vote -- you may want to use the image again of the lyres we hang up, or the stone of the destroyed temple -- what we are giving up -- and also the image of the new song we are invited to discover and sing. You can do a similar thing with the other images in any of the devotions.

Devotional #2

(Suggested symbol: a star - a sticker, or participants can draw their own)



Call to Worship:

God is good ... **All the time.**

All the time ... God is good.

God who birthed the stars and breathed creation into being cherishes us.

God who dreamed impossible dreams of a baby cradled in arthritic arms challenges us.

Wherever we are and wherever we go, **God is with us.**

Centering Song: Behold, Behold I Make All Things New (# 115, *More Voices*)

Reflection:

Let us hear these words of scripture -- written long ago for people dreaming dreams of home:

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18-19)

(Silence)

Read Genesis 15:5-7

When God called Sarai and Abram to leave behind everything they knew, God made a promise.

I'll be with you, God said. I'll give you a land and descendants, as many as the stars in the sky.

Re-read Genesis 15:5-7

As it turned out, Sarah and Abraham themselves would never reach the promised land. They did what they could do; step out faithfully into the unknown, into the unshaped silence, and trust God for the rest.

I wonder, when they felt lost and unsure, if they lay beneath the stars and remembered.

I wonder what stars call and comfort us as we contemplate the changes before us as a church.

Prayer: (adapted from *Calling on God: Inclusive Christian Prayers for Three Years of Sundays*, by Peter Bankson and Deborah Sokolove, Page 292-3)

O God of unfathomable promises, you came to Abram and Sarai in the late afternoon or life, and promised them their children, yet unborn, would be more numerous than the stars. You promised them an answer for their people, an answer so unexpected it left them speechless.

O God, your love is like those almost unseen threads that link us to each other and to the world beyond our doors, tough threads of care and compassion, cords of action and reflection.

O God, we praise you for your power of creation. We raise up times and places where even though it seemed too late, your loving presence made a way through all the cold confusion to a place of life.

(Silence)

Live in us now; be our promise and our way. Amen.

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Devotional #3

(Suggested symbol: Sand - put some sand in a big bowl on the table and invite participants to come up and run their hands through it)



Call to Worship:

God is good ... **All the time.**

All the time ... God is good.

God who worked with us as we built a life wherever we were planted, tends us.

God who by fiery and cloudy pillar draws us into unknown territory -- never leaves us.

Wherever we are and wherever we go, **God is with us.**

Centering Song: Behold, Behold I Make All Things New (# 115, *More Voices*)

Reflection:

Let us hear these words of scripture -- written long ago for people dreaming dreams of home:

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18-19)

(Silence)

Read Exodus 13:21-22

When God’s people were leaving the slavery of Egypt behind, they sang and danced. The sea had not yet parted. They were not yet free, but they were on their way.

The way of freedom, though, involved discomfort, and unknowing, and a whole lot of sand.

Sand of unknowing. Sand that got in their eyes, and other places, and was really uncomfortable.

Out of the sand, God made a promise: a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day to guide them. They were not alone.

Re-read Exodus: 13:21-22:

I wonder. I wonder what pillars guide us when nights are long; and what clouds, though hiding the sun, give us assurance and hope.

Prayer:

Great Cloud of Unknowing: you guided your beloved ones in ages past, through solid ground and shifting sands. Your enveloping mystery drew them and reassured them. In your transforming and transformative presence you accompanied and challenged: in the heart of the cloud your fire abided -- in the heart of the fire your cloud waited.

Unknowing God, you are unknowable and yet known, and you know us to the core: in our songs of joy and our complaints as we journey into the way. Empower us to know that you go with us and that you wait at journey’s ending and new beginnings. Amen.

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Devotional #4

(Suggested symbol: sunglasses)



Call to Worship:

God is good ... **All the time.**

All the time ... God is good.

God`s great light shines to us from ancient prophets and faithful sisters and brothers.

God is the unknown glow ahead of us, drawing us forward on stumbling feet.

Wherever we are and wherever we go, **God is with us.**

Centering Song: Behold, Behold I Make All Things New (# 115, *More Voices*)

Reflection:

Let us hear these words of scripture -- written long ago for people dreaming dreams of home:

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18-19)

(Silence)

Read Exodus 34:29

I wonder what would happen if we had Moses. What if we were all gathering in Banff or Jasper and noticed that he`d been gone for a while and someone said, “Hey where`d Moses get off to?”

And then, suddenly we looked and he was coming down from the mountain, huffing and puffing. And we noticed he was carrying something, and he looked really shiny!

But when he got close we saw he was carrying a stack of papers. And he said “I bring to you Remits from on high! But I did a little negotiating with the big woman upstairs. We were supposed to get 10 remits but I cut it down to only 8!

And then we realized Moses wasn`t really shining after all -- it was just the sun getting in our eyes.

Re-read Exodus 34:29

Some church stuff is glorious and glowing! And some doesn`t seem shiny at all. But I wonder if it is easy to forget that all the church stuff we do is God stuff. Now that`s not to say that every decision, or program or mission statement or budget or Remit comes from God. You may want to stop and chuckle for a minute.

But I think we can say what we do really is about God -- even though we may not think of it that way; even though we certainly don`t all agree about what we do; even though we make mistakes.

But the rock bottom truth is that we are church because of God.

Re-read Exodus 34:29

When we talk with God -- and indeed when we talk with one another and struggle and grapple with hard things -- we may find that Love is at the bedrock of who we are and whose we are.

And we can recognize that Divine Spark of Love within each one of us, no matter where we sit on the issue or even if we disagree; and when we do this -- we do not realize how we shine.

I wonder how God is shining in us right now.

Prayer: (adapted from *Calling on God: Inclusive Christian Prayers for Three Years of Sundays*, by Peter Bankson and Deborah Sokolove, Page 288)

God of prophets and poets, God of land and sea and air, God of all that is seen and all that is unseen, you have given us this day, this hour, this moment.

With grateful hearts, we see your face shining in the faces of those we love, in the laughing eyes of children rolling down a long hill; in the hopeful glance of the person who asks us for our change; in church folk who gather around tables or sit in pews, who read reports and attend meetings.

We thank you for calling us to be your light in the world, a beacon of peace and justice and love and hope, the radiant, living Body of the risen Christ. Amen.

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Devotional #5

(Suggested symbol - a fish!)



Devotional #5:

Call to Worship:

God is good ... **All the time.**

All the time ... God is good.

The Risen Voice who called to ancient fishers calls us in the here and now.

And God is the net that catches us as we are just swimming along on that other side.

Wherever we are and wherever we go, **God is with us.**

Centering Song: Behold, Behold I Make All Things New (# 115, *More Voices*)

Reflection:

Let us hear these words of scripture -- written long ago for people dreaming dreams of home:

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18-19)

(Silence)

Read John 21:4-6

Jesus was risen!

Or so some said.

The disciples had, either unexplainably or understandably, depending on your point of view, given up. And gone home. Back to what they knew.

I'm going fishing, Peter said with a shrug. It was what he knew. The empty tomb was too confusing. The reports from Mary, well they were unreliable at best. When in doubt, go back to what you know. What has always worked. Except, it wasn't working anymore.

He hauled those nets. He did everything the way he'd always done. Nothing. Not one fish.

All flaming night.

Re-read John 21:4-6

And then, a voice from the shore. Why not try the other side? Why not indeed.

153.

That's how many fish we're told they hauled in. We're also told that 153 was the exact number of species of fish in the known world at that time. A number of inclusion; a number of unity.

I wonder what would happen if we really do cast our nets on the other side.

And I wonder what fish are waiting to be counted.

Prayer: (adapted from *Calling on God: Inclusive Christian Prayers for Three Years of Sundays*, by Peter Bankson and Deborah Sokolove, Page 307)

Holy Fountain of abundant life, with every creature in heaven and on earth and under the sea we bless and thank you. We give you thanks for the resurrection of your holy child, Jesus, who lives among us and through us and in us, the living body of Christ, doing your work in the world.

We give you thanks for picnics and banquets, for leisurely meals shared with friends, and for days when we are too busy to eat. We give you thanks for revelations and visions, for ordinary days and even for sleepless nights.

Like the birds that greet each morning with song, we sing your praises aloud and in silence, giving thanks for your holy name.

(Silence)

May your abundant life be our feast. Amen.

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All is made New" -- Words: Curtis Tufts; Tune: Godpoint (#283 *Voices United*)

All is made new by the One who made us.
All is renewed in the Spirit's bright flame.
All is made new when we follow faith-fully.
All is renewed by the One who calls our name.

Come, be made new: hear a new song ringing.
Come, be renewed: turn and see a new way.
Come, be made new: join a new creation.
Come, be renewed: be the dawn of love's new day!

Life is made new on the path of justice.
Life is renewed when we give peace a chance.
Life is made new in our love's fierce tenderness.*
Life is renewed as we join the Spirit's dance!

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**Fierce Tenderness* is the title of a book by feminist theologian Linda Hunt.