

Sudbury United Churches Shared Worship

96th Anniversary of the United Church of Canada

“What does the United Church of Canada mean to me?”

Recorded Worship, airing on Youtube, June 6th, 2021

Full Text of Worship

This worship was produced with contributions from the following churches:

St. Andrew’s United Church,

St. John’s United Church,

St. Mark’s United Church,

St. Peter’s United Church,

St. Stephen’s on the Hill United Church,

Grace United Church,

Larchwood United Church,

Trinity United Church, Capreol,

Trinity United Church, Lively,

Copper Cliff United Church

Instrumental Musical prelude

Martial Air, by Purcell

Air and March, by Handel

musician, Graham Laporte
St. Andrew’s United Church

Welcome & Acknowledgment of Traditional Territory

Martha Cunningham Closs, St. John’s United Church

Greetings All. Welcome to Union Sunday! I’m Martha, and I’m coming to you from St. John’s United Church in Levack.

On June 10, 1925 member congregations in the Toronto area held their first worship service as part of the new United Church of Canada. The denomination was an amalgam of Canadian Congregationalist, Methodist, most Presbyterian, and Prairie Provinces churches which had already federated locally. The United Church instantly became one of the largest Christian church bodies in Canada and remains so to this day.

Today, during this time of distancing, many of the United Churches across Greater Sudbury are worshiping together virtually to provide a collective service for us all. We miss being with each other in person but right now we have this opportunity to worship with United Church members from across the city and on this Union Sunday reflect on what it means to be part of the United Church of Canada.

I'm standing in front of St. John's Reconciliation Wall. As United Church members we understand that a respectful and meaningful territory acknowledgement can inspire people to think about how they have come to be here, including the impacts of colonialism. A formal acknowledgement can foster a sense of responsibility and be motivation to learn more about the people whose lands we live on, wherever we come from. It can offer an opportunity to reflect on what we will do differently based on what we have learned.

We acknowledge that the lands on which we are providing worship today are the traditional territories of the Atikameksheng Anishinabek and the Wahnapiatae First Nations. We acknowledge that as treaty people we are part of the Robinson-Huron Treaties. As Christians, we also offer our gratitude for the opportunity to share the land with Indigenous peoples and we commit ourselves to the ongoing process of reconciliation.

Opening Hymn: Let us Build a House More Voices, 1 musician, Eleanor Connors
St. Mark's United Church

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found, in water, wine and wheat;
A banquet hall on holy ground, where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace;
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Call to Worship: Cynthia Czigarenko, St. Stephen's on the Hill United Church

Greetings from St. Stephen's on the Hill United Church in New Sudbury. We are filming this segment in one of our church's sacred spaces- the church kitchen. When we were asked to consider the question, "What does the United Church of Canada mean to us?", for obvious

reasons, we thought about church food. Sharing food is one of the cornerstones of our faith. Upstairs in our sanctuary, we regularly share the food of communion, the body of Christ offered in bread broken, the cup of blessing showing us love poured out. But after the service is over, downstairs in this kitchen, we continue to share the bounty of God, in coffee and juice, in homemade cookies, and date squares on a really good day, and always with the sound of laughter filling the room, conversation growing, a community living out its mission of caring for one another, just as Jesus instructed.

For the United Church, both the wonder and strength of our denomination is its diversity. The gathering of people from across this city preparing today's anniversary service attests to the goodness of our God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Whenever and how ever we gather, we are God's people. So, "Happy Anniversary United Church of Canada." Let us worship God.

My name is Cynthia. Joining me in the kitchen for this filming are Lila, Barb, Rev. Catherine, and we offer special thanks to our cameraman, Brendan Bilani.

Opening Prayer

Lila Anderson, St. Stephen's on the Hill United Church

Faithful God, we thank you for the ways we glimpse your goodness and glory. We thank you for the joy of living. We ask your blessing upon our church communities. Thank you for the faith, the hope, and the love which have sustained us and guided us over our ninety-six-year history as The United Church of Canada. May we raise our voices in thanks and praise for your goodness, for your guidance, and for your leading. Help us to continue to follow the path of Jesus, who is our hope and our way. Lord, bless the food upon these dishes, as Thou hast blest the loaves and fishes. And like the sugar in our tea, may our spirits, be stirred by Thee. Amen.

Scripture Acts 2:41-47

Barbara McPhail, St. Stephen's on the Hill United Church

Those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 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 good will of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. Amen.

Reflection:

Rev. Catherine Somerville, St. Stephen's on the Hill United Church

This is a place of miracles. In this kitchen, think of all the people through the years have been fed in body and in spirit. You don't go away hungry from a church kitchen. This is the place of turkey suppers and potlucks, wedding banquets and funeral gatherings, lunch meetings, dinners, youth group pizza parties, Sunday School cookie bake-offs, along with all those weekly after church coffee hours. The miracle of a church kitchen is that there is always enough.

I remember one of our members, Pat McOrmond, now welcomed as one of the saints of God, telling us once, that when asked, her son James said that his favourite food was “church pot luck.” Teenage boys could eat here until they were satisfied. That in and of itself, is a true miracle.

A church kitchen is sacred space because room is always made for one more. Over a cuppa, stories are shared, sadness is carried by the community, love and laughter become as real as the good smells emanating from the oven. Upstairs, we may gather and are fed with words of memory that centre and ground us. But, down here, in the church kitchen, the ordinary becomes almost as sacred as the bread and cup of communion. Love becomes real whenever food is shared.

This past year, throughout the pandemic, the most vulnerable people in our city have seen that love embodied, through your dedicated weekly offerings of food. Muffins, snacks, sandwiches and fruit continue to be delivered to the Overnight Off the Street Homeless Shelter and to the various warming centres. In the early days of lockdown, United Church members and friends heard the whispers of our neighbours and we were the first to step up and do what we do best. Share the gospel, by sharing our food. Show concern by baking, making sure to add a healthy spoonful of prayer to the mixing and the stirring. Feeding hungry people because Jesus told us what to do.

In that passage Barb shared just a moment ago, we heard how the apostles demonstrated their love for God by doing something as simple and profound as sharing their bread. They ate together. That tradition has kept us strong and united. For us here at St. Stephen’s, the United Church means that the open table of communion is made real in the world by the open welcome in the church kitchen. Come and pull up a chair, take a cup of coffee, listen to a story, and feel your heart grow with the knowledge that you belong here. All are welcome!

For food in a world where many walk in hunger
For faith in a world where many walk in fear
For friends in a world where many walk alone,
We give you humble thanks, O Lord.

And now, from all of us at St. Stephen’s on the Hill United Church in New Sudbury to all of you watching today, we say: “Happy Anniversary!” (take your mask off before you eat your cake!)

Hymn: Draw the Circle Wide More Voices 145 Trinity United Church Choir, Capreol

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

God the still-point of the circle,
‘round whom all creation turns;

Nothing lost, but held forever,
In God's gracious arms

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

Let our hearts touch far horizons,
So encompass great and small;
Let our loving know no borders,
Faithful to God's call.

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

Let the dreams we dream be larger,
Than we've ever dreamed before;
Let the dream of Christ be in us,
Open every door.

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

Scripture: Matthew 18: 10–14

Tracy Saarikoski, Grace United Church

Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Reflection:

Rita O'Link, Grace United Church

No longer welcome. Cast out. Not wanted. That's what happened to me at the evangelical church I happened to be in. I was raised nominally Catholic and became an evangelical and I thought I found my church home, I thought I found my church family. I was there for 32 years in this denomination. I thought I knew them well. Turned out I didn't.

I told them the truth about me, about me being trans. They still hadn't seen me that way. But that was enough.

I was no longer seen fit for service.

I was no longer able to help. I was too unclean to even pick up empty coffee cups in the little café that they have. I wasn't welcome around the children anymore. It was very hard, very difficult.

My wife and I at the time, we used to go there and every second Sunday I had to go alone. This particular Sunday I was alone and I just couldn't bring myself to go. There was a little United Church up around the corner that I passed frequently on my drives, and I knew what time the service started. I decided to go there just so that I had been to church. I went in and the welcome was amazing and wonderful. Rev. Erin Todd was the minister, and she officiated, and I heard the most wonderful words.

But would happen once they heard about me, once I told them the truth?

So, I decided to ask Rev. Erin if she would go with me for a coffee during the week and I told her. She told me to just hang on through the Christmas season, and she would deal with it in the new year, and she did. She went to every member of that congregation and had a little conversation about me and my truth.

I was welcomed. That day in February when I got the news that everyone knew and everyone accepted me just the way that I was, and that I could come just the way that I am - not having to hide who I am. That first Sunday – O my goodness, that first Sunday! That was Saturday I was told, and that Sunday I was able to go as myself for the first time.

What does the United Church mean to me? It means being accepted. It means being able to be exactly who I am. Ninety-six years for this denomination and I'm so thankful that it's a home for ones like me, the sheep that have been cast out. I was found and I was brought in and I was welcomed. Thank you, United Church. I love you and I love my church family. Bye for now.

Anthem: "Come Build a Church," by Ken Medema
Copper Cliff, St. Peter's, St. Andrew's United Church combined choirs

This anthem was chosen for the United Church Anniversary because of the words. They are filled with HOPE, and suggest that we, as people, can be a unified church, wherever we may be.

We, as a United Church can be guided by the hand and word of God.

During the pandemic, when physical services were unavailable, we were able to keep Jesus in our lives and find ways to keep "the church" together, filled with HOPE, SUPPORT and HUMANITY. We are reminded that WE are the church- not the buildings in which we worship.

*"Come build a church with soul and spirit,
Come build a church of flesh and bone.
We need no tower rising skyward;
No house of wood or glass or stone.
Come build a church with human frailty,
Come build a church of flesh and blood.
Jesus shall be its sure foundation.
It shall be built by the hand of God."*

Scripture: Mark 10:17-31

Liz Chorkawy, Trinity United Church, Lively

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Reflection:

Torrin Maag, St. Andrew’s United Church

My brother told me my reflection should be “4-words long”: “The United Church is a gathering of good people.” While that is, in fact, 9 words, it’s a pretty good summary of our experience. The church has been a supporting and loving community for us. It guided me throughout my life: I built my childhood at Camp Lorraine, I counted my teenage years by youth trips. Youth events are this sacred space where fellowship and Christ and hormones mix into a weird space of vulnerability and self-creation that I couldn’t find anywhere else. Many of the most significant moments of my life happened during these youth trips. They were meaningful and important to me. Your mileage may vary, but I’d encourage any youth to go and try ‘em. Vulnerable community is rare in a goal-oriented society.

But I don’t think that community is meaning enough for a Church. After all, there are plenty of secular gatherings of good people. I have heard other people suggest that the meaning of Church is teaching ethical behaviour. And that is important, but it’s not exclusive to churches. Some progressive Christians claim that the meaning of Church is acting as society’s conscience,

directing us towards the oppressed and marginalized. And that is important, the prophetic voice ringing from the dark, but again it is not unique to churches.

These reasons are ultimately secular justifications, non-religious explanations of religious behaviour. And I just don't think that's ever going to be enough. Jesus says: "follow me." All the good fruits the following produces fall from the tree of discipleship. The call pre-empts any reasons. Jesus never says, "follow me because of this"; he says, "follow me and we will do this." Community, ethics, justice... all must proceed from the essential moment of faith – the encounter between I and the Eternal You: God.

How does a church, like The United Church, a "we," fit into the call to discipleship, which always is going to be between the singular I and the 'You' of God? How can an institution enter a living relationship? I think that, instead of understanding the United Church, or even church more generally, as an institution, a creed, a group of people, a historical movement, or a collection of buildings – things that are stable and well-defined – we should think of the church as a story we are telling together. My United Church is not your United Church; The United Church in my mind is a collection of people, ideas, values, feelings, places, times, moments... all specific to my own experience. There is thus no single, cohesive definition of the United Church. There is no essence which we all perceive. No, the Church only exists in relationship to us, a living center to which we all relate.

This story shapes and molds us, just as we shape and mold it. It can bring us closer to each other or alienate us from our neighbour. It has done both in the past. Yet, for what it's worth, I think the story of the United Church beautiful. This story was a lifeline when I stumbled towards dark places other friends were so lucky to avoid. It taught me to celebrate difference, that the creation of God is infinitely beautiful and infinitely complex. It taught me that no question is off limits, that no inquiry is off-limits, even if it can cause problems for what we previously believed.

Relationships are organic; they need soil to grow and nutrients to sustain them. As a living center, the Church is soil for our relationships with each other and with God. Church is a space in which you can hear the call that addressed solely to you – "come follow me" – which is the same call that also brings us towards the Other – "and be fishers of men." Love God and your neighbour. After this encounter, after the moment of faith, we are placed under this ethical call. Then we must nurture our relationships from the soil of church; then we must we seek justice and resist evil, we must give up what is ours for what is God's and walk the hard path of love. When the call of the Other, of God and of neighbour, becomes secondary, the Church becomes just another political institution; good and useful, but dead to divine relationship.

I am not sure I yet walk this path. When Christ tells me "give up all you have and follow me" I have found it far more comfortable to live my normal, safely "progressive" life. To embrace what is required by culture but to embrace the infinite call of infinite love. Yet weekly, I confront with the call again in virtual church pews.

I believe that is what The United Church means to me.

Offering & Dedication:

Cindy Hebert, Larchwood United Church

Creator, all that we have and all that we are, flows through us from you.

Thank you for the gifts of creativity and energy and talent that brought us together today and the offering that came forward as this service of union together.

Thank you for your call to use our gifts whatever they are, so that they flow through the universe out into what needs to be done.

We give thanks especially today for the ways that people are accepting the invitation that you are giving us to make offerings of love, whether its sharing a bowl of soup, or calling, texting, or zooming friends, family and congregations;

whether it's feeding muffins to the hungry or giving financial contributions so that the staggering difficulties that our churches are facing can still be managed.

Every kind of gift that we bring is cherished in your eyes, God.

May all of our offerings be only a small of our commitment to your extravagant showings.

Bless all the gifts we bring before you now, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Jean Cornthwaite, St. Mark's United Church

Please bow with me in prayer this morning.

On this day that God has made and blessed,

it is a celebration of the union of churches that make up The United Church of Canada.

Our gracious and merciful God, we come before you in thanksgiving and joy this morning.

As we give thanks for your presence with us in sharing in our celebration of those churches of whom were Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian, who came together in union on June 10, 1925.

We were and are your people, the sheep of your pasture,

the branches of your holy vine, and the supple clay of the potter.

You have provided for us in the years gone past, and we trust you to care for the whole of our future.

The Lord is our Shepherd, and we have all that we need.

You let us lie down in green meadows, and rest beside clear peaceful waters.

We give thanks for the many faithful people who have passed into glory.

From the past to the present, may we who are left remain faithful to their vision.

And, Oh Lord, as we think of others who suffer today from the sickness of Covid to various illnesses,

we pray for them, the lonely and alone, the bereaved who have lost one well loved, especially as we continue to face this monstrous illness of Covid.

Our Lord knew the trauma of losing one well loved,

and he sympathizes, empathizes and weeps with us.

We remember our family members, relatives, friends, coworkers

and others who face trouble and trials in this time of pandemic:

the first line workers, doctors, nurses and volunteers.

We pray for the street people, the children, all who work our city and the world a better place.

We pray for the leaders of our vast country and of our cities,
that they may be given the wisdom to make decisions
that are wise and good for the benefit of all people.
We pray for calmer minds and spirits as the confrontation between Israel and Palestine is put
on pause.

We give thanks that we can freely approach the throne of grace to bring our requests to God,
who listens thoughtfully and answers all prayer.

Therefore, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,
for He who has promised is faithful.

We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ,

God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit as we repeat the words given to us:

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,

For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory,

Forever and ever, Amen.

Closing Hymn: "The Church's One Foundation," Voices United 332

St. Peter's United Church Choir
Eleanor Masotti, piano

The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord.
She is his new creation by water and the word;
From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation one Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.

'Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war;
She waits the consummation of peace for evermore,
Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God the three in one,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won,
O happy ones and holy! Lord give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly,

On high may dwell with thee.

Blessing and Commissioning

Faye Moffatt and Judy Sumner,
Trinity United Church, Capreol

Now go forth into the world as the Church, proclaiming the love of God.

Response: We are the Church!

Go forth into the world, actively working for justice and inclusivity.

Response: We are the Church!

Go forth into the world, actively working to support Mother Earth and all her creatures.

Response: We are the Church!

We go into the world as God's Church,

Knowing that God is beside us,

Before us and behind us

As we journey.

Amen!

Choral Benediction "Bind Us Together"

Copper Cliff United Church Choir

The Benediction, "Bind us Together", was chosen to encourage us all to LOVE one another as we move forward in our lives.

"Bind us together, Lord, bind us together

With cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together

Bind us together with love.

"There is only one God.

There is only one Kin

There is only one body,

And that is why we can sing."

Musical postlude "O God Beyond All Praising" (tune, Thaxted), by Gustave Holst

St. Peter's Brass Ensemble

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The video production of this worship was edited by Mary Mayoros of St. Mark's United Church,
and is hosted on the St. Mark's Youtube channel at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSJ1bMyw0DQ>

We are grateful to Mary for her generosity, and to the many volunteers who contributed
video, music, reflections and photographs to create this special worship.

Thanks be to God for your creativity, cooperation, joy and sense of adventure!