

**SERVICE FOR USE DURING CONFERENCE MEETING WEEKEND**  
**June 5, 2016**

(Many of the elements of this service are the ones that will be used during the Service of Praise at the Annual Meeting of Conference held in Regina, Saskatchewan.)

**GATHERING**

**Music Prelude:**

**Welcome:**

**Call to Worship:**

It is in the name of Jesus that I call you to join with brothers and sisters here are around the globe in worshipping God this day.

God is here among us in this place.

**God is here within us now and always.**

God is here and so we worship.

**Opening Prayer:**

Spirit of the living God, fall fresh upon us;  
 may your presence fill us with the desire to live with compassion and integrity with all.

**Come, Divine Spirit, and dwell among us.**

**We need your wisdom to help us love our neighbour  
 and speak the truth of reconciliation in the world.**

Give us strength to stand and be witnesses in our homes, our schools,  
 and our jobs.

**Come to this place, to this worship and make us one with each other,**

It is in the name of our brother and companion we pray, Amen.

**Hymn:        People Let Us Walk Together (MV 179)**

**Prayer of Confession:**

In the lives of neighbours who suffer brokenness and pain:

**We confess you are still speaking!**

In the struggle of the poor whose rights are not honoured:

**We confess you are still speaking!**

In a world crying out for wisdom, love and mercy:

**We confess you are still speaking!**

In a world crying out for love and compassion:

**We confess you are still speaking!**

In a world calling for the blessing of truth:

**We confess you are still speaking!**

Together we seek transformation and reconciliation:

**We confess that in our lives we often hide behind  
our work and play, schools and jobs, fun and technology.**

**We let ourselves get so busy  
that we forget the world around us.**

**We admit that the distractions of the world  
pull us into selfishness and silence our witness.**

**Teach us to champion the cause of justice for all,  
strengthen us to love our neighbour,  
and speak truth through words and actions. Amen.**

**Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Even as we speak our words of confession we are already forgiven!

When the tomb was found empty  
and the stone rolled away

God announced to the world,  
that Grace was free.

That death had no hold over us.

That love would always win.

That in Jesus Christ we have been reconciled back to God,  
And nothing can separate us from God's love.

**Thanks be to God! Amen.**

**Conversation with the young and young at heart:**

A couple of options depending on your space and typical worshipping congregation.

- 1) Play a quick game of blob tag. One child is it, as they tag other children they join together and become of the group trying to tag others until everyone is part of the "blob". Follow this up with a discussion.
- 2) Begin with yourself, stand up if you... (or raise hand for adults). Keep asking questions until everyone is standing or has their hand raised. If there are kids present you could let them to come up with the ideas to get people to stand. Some examples might be, have brown shoes, have ever left Canada, have blonde hair, have a pet etc. Follow up with a discussion.

Potential discussion: There are lots of things that make us different from one another. Can you think of some things that make us different from one another? (allow for answers).

When we played the game, more and more people became part of the group even though there were differences. What did you notice about the game? (allow for answers).

(If you played blob tag, you may want to point out that it both became more challenging as the group got bigger, and more fun).

Following God is kind of like that game. We start out different and spread out and separate, but as we follow God, we get drawn closer to one another. God brings us closer together.

Let's Pray, repeat after me:

Dear God

we thank you for friends and family,  
for games and fun  
for laughter.

We thank you that you help us to make new friends,  
to get closer to new people.

Help us to always reach out to new people,  
to keep making new friends.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Hymn: Three Things I Promise (MV176)**

## THE WORD

**Gospel Reading: Luke 10: 25 – 28 (NRSV)**

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

**Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 5: 16 – 6: 2 (NRSV)**

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”  
See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

**Reflection:** “Them too?”

Let us pray,  
May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts find favor in your sight O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Some days, being a youth, or pre-teen is really hard. Those of us past our teen years may remember them fondly, but most of us have a scar or two from those years. It is a stage in life of huge change, both personally and socially as expectations on you change from being just a kid on the playground to more and more responsibility and pressure from adults and school. Throw in major hormonal changes and you have a time of enormous stress. It is in the midst of all this that youth start to move from children to adults, and navigate what that means for them. It is here that the dreaded life event comes - the birthday party. Who do you invite? Your friends that you’ve had forever, your family, or your new friends - who are just a bit cooler than your old friends? A friend of mine was recently going through this with her son, and reminded him that he couldn’t just abandon his best friend or his cousin, and no he also couldn’t have more than one birthday party. He would just have to find a way to include them all. I can still hear his voice in my head as she recalled their conversation which ended with him saying, “Really? Him too?” Her response to her son, “Yes, him too.” Some days it seems impossible for everyone to be able to come to a table together - the people of Corinth certainly never thought it would be possible - But God brings us together anyways.

Our reading today is a piece of a longer letter from Paul to the people of Corinth. And they don’t exactly have the perfect relationship. Paul had arrived in Corinth, where he went to the synagogue, worked with the locals, and started a church. He had brought some folks into the faith, preached and taught all about Jesus, and a new church was formed. With things going well, Paul moved on - to another town, to another place, to another new church.

After he had left, things did not stay going well. Paul received word that relationships within Corinth had broken down. Divisions were being formed; some folks were claiming to be better than others. So Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians.

This didn't quite fix everything. Soon outside influences began to create even more division and havoc within the church in Corinth. So Paul sent an emissary. This did not have the desired effect as he was sent away, the people refusing to change. The fracturing within the church just continued to get worse and worse. Can you imagine the frustration Paul felt? He could see all the hard work slipping away. Perhaps even worse, he could see relationships disintegrating.

So Paul tries to go himself, and sends more letters. Some we have some have been lost. But we do know that things didn't magically get better. The ministry that Paul had started was quickly falling apart. And when the tide began to turn a bit, when some of the people of Corinth began to listen to Paul once more - as soon as he had an opening, Paul sent them this letter. Paul reminded the people of Corinth, that there would always be forces in the world that would try to divide them. The people of Corinth had allowed other influences to take them away from each other, away from themselves.

And don't we do the same every day? The world around us is constantly trying to divide us, so much so that we often don't notice anymore. Sometimes we even embrace it. Divisions are everywhere.

We are divided by gender, race, and religion, rural vs. urban, age, ability, north and south, rich and poor.

We have committees and special interest groups.

Political parties and clubs.

Those in the know, and those who are ill-informed.

Some days we cannot stand all the divisions, and some days it passes without us realizing it. Sometimes we are even grateful. When we watch the news and see the political landscape facing other countries, we think, "Well, I'm sure glad I don't live there." When we hear on the news about wars and violence ongoing, we offer thanks to be living somewhere safe.

When we are told of the risks of terrorism, parts of us are glad for security at airports and borders.

When we encounter homelessness and poverty, we think "Well, I'm glad that's not me." We brush aside those with mental illness, because surely they aren't

trying hard enough. We have heard over and over by media, politicians, in stories and movies, that some people are just a bit more worthy. They earned what they have. And slowly it begins to seep into us. We are behaving as though this is true without even realizing it.

Some of the divisions are stark and shake us up. And some we come to expect and ignore as just part of life.

I recently had an experience of trying to help a youth register for conference. That should be simple right? Everyone knows they need to be named as a delegate to conference by their presbytery. When? Oh at the last meeting that the youth knew nothing about. Or at the later special meeting - which the youth again knew nothing about. So here I was with a youth, asking me why? Why was it so complicated? Why was it so hard to just get a seat at the table? We get so used to the way things are, to the way our churches operate that we can't image what it means to see it from the outside. Those in the know, those who live within the systems easily navigate those same systems and rules. And those outside, well that's just the way it is right?

Even as the world continues to find ways to divide us, we find new ways of dividing ourselves. Of keeping others out. It's thousands of years later, and in some ways we are just like the people of Corinth.

The people of Corinth had allowed themselves to become divided. And the path back seemed too far and too long.

But Paul reminded them that the hardest part was already done. Christ had already reconciled them to God - and Christ would reconcile them to one another.

When a group said, "You must be like us to be faithful", Jesus had pulled up another chair at the table and said, "They too are welcome here."

When someone said, "Our gifts make us superior", "With our knowledge we should surely be in charge", "With our ability to prophesy we should be in charge", or "With our visions we should be in charge," Jesus said, "There is room here for you all."

Every single time society said someone was not welcome, Jesus reminded those around him that they were. The tax collectors and the lawyers. The fishermen and the centurions. The samaritans and the gentiles. Men and women. Those broken and those healed. All have a seat at Christ's table. Again and again Jesus brought the groups back together. Reminding everyone

first and foremost of their identity as a child of God. So the table just got bigger and bigger. When everyone thought the divisions were simply how things were to be, Jesus brought people together.

God doesn't leave us divided. God continues to bring us back together with one another.

A year ago I was able to be a part of taking a youth group to Mexico. We spent so much time together fundraising, working on team building, and worshiping together that this became an incredibly tight knit group of youth. So much so that it became easy for me to forget that they hadn't always been that way. That these youth came from very different social circles at school. Social groupings at school dictate who you are supposed to hang out with, who you are supposed to be friends with. The jocks and the studious students don't really mix. The popular and the unpopular steer clear of one another.

But this group of youth had them all. And when we gather, everyone has a voice. Those youth who had been told by the world around them that they should ignore each other at best, found connections and value in one another. God had brought them together with one another, and they began to see each other as God sees them, children of God.

The world tries to divide us; it says that some are more worthy than others. Those who have worked hard - earned it. Those who live here, their lives are more valuable; those in cities, those with money, those of European descent. The world says hold onto what you can.

Christ says to let go. You have already been reconciled to God. New creation is here. Not someday, but now. Today. This very day - bit by bit.

Everyone will have a seat at the table. The young and old, the rich and poor, men, women, cisgendered, transgendered, all races, everyone. Those of us who are broken, and those who are closer to being whole, saints and sinners, all have a seat. Does this mean the table will look different? Yup! Absolutely. *New Creation*. It won't be the same. We've seen the old, and now when we look we can see glimpses of the new. Christ has done the hardest part already, the work has begun. And we are invited to join - to let go of what holds us back, of what restrains us - bureaucracy, fear, grief. All of it. For we are guided by Christ, and there is no better guide. We are welcomed into the new creation with open arms, reconciled to God and one another.

We are called into action. And in our own creed we state our own commitment to reconcile and make new. This sometimes sends us into uncomfortable places.

Into places with risk.

When it seems too big, and we aren't sure where to start, Jesus has told us what to do. Look around, who is your neighbour? Who is missing? Who do you see at the grocery store or the bank, but never at social or church gatherings? Start there - go to where they are and dare to say hello. To that youth with the ripped jeans, and surely bad attitude, to the homeless person you pass on your commute every day, to the individual going to worship at the mosque. Look again, and sure enough you'll see Christ in them. These are the first steps of reconciliation, which let us have glimpses of God's new creation. A creation better than this. We are capable of so much more.

Reconciliation won't be easy. And it won't be quick. The youth who had trouble getting registered for conference. They made it. For a while there, the bureaucracy got in the way of loving reconciling relationship with one another. When we get caught up in ourselves, we are invited to walk a mile in our neighbours' shoes. To dare to let go of what is most precious to us, whether our pride, or ego, or power. We are instead invited into humility in Christ. To embrace the power of love, of letting go in the name of love. For we are loved, and are invited to share with others for who they are, beloved children, broken and whole. It means sometimes we will need to be quiet when we would rather be speaking. Sometimes when others join the table it means we won't like the food, or the music, or the clothes being worn. But once all have a seat, all of that falls away as Christ's love is reflected around the table, we catch a glimpse of the new creation already beginning.

For we have already been reconciled back to God. And now we are a part of that reconciliation ministry. And our world needs that prophetic witness now more than ever. When we are told to fear one another, to value some over others, to hold onto our power and possessions, the message of Christ couldn't be more different. Dare to let go. To pull up another chair to the table. To first look and see, the beloved children of God all around. For when the work seems hard or even impossible, we are reminded, that it is God's work, and we are just a part, for God has pulled up a chair for us already. We are already welcomed in. And to that we say, thanks be to God. Amen.

## THE RESPONSE

**Hymn:        Though I May Speak (VU 372)**



**Offering:**

Let us make our offerings to God.  
 As God has been generous and gracious in gifts to us,  
 Let us also be generous and gracious in gifts for the work of God's  
 church. Let us receive the offering.

**The Gifts For and of God Are Gathered:****Dedication of Offering:**

**In love and joy we present our gifts and we present ourselves  
 that the work of the church may be done.**

**Hymn: What Can I Do? (MV191)****Prayers of the People**

Gracious God,  
 whose love knows no bounds  
 who seeks wholeness and reconciliation with to and for all your peoples.  
 We bring to you our prayers; those we speak aloud as well as the unspoken  
 prayers of our hearts.

We pray especially for our brothers and sisters around the world,  
 those of your children living under oppression.  
 Our fellow Christians persecuted for their faith.  
 Those who know what it is to live without:  
     without security  
     without freedom from fear  
     without the hope of a better tomorrow.  
 Those whose relationship with their government is one of fear and struggle.  
 We hold them in our hearts and pray that they might know the safety of your love  
 to feel the wholeness of your loving embrace.  
 Hear our prayer O God.

We pray for our leaders.  
 Those of our communities and nations and our church.  
 As they face decisions made in the past,  
 and seek to guide your people to a better envisioned future.  
 We hold them in our hearts  
 and pray that they might know the passion of your love:  
 to lead with prophetic voices for our future.  
 Hear our prayer O God

We pray for our neighbors.  
 Those who are near to us and those further away.  
 As our friends and families face new joys and new sorrows,  
 new uncertainties, new hopes.  
 As they begin new adventures and try to heal old wounds.  
 Loving God, help them to know  
 that in their brokenness and their blessings they are your beloved,  
 and a beloved part of this family.

We lift up these prayers and the silent prayers of our hearts.

*Silence*

We pray these things in the name of your son, Jesus the Christ who taught us to pray together saying,

**Our Father in heaven,  
 hallowed be your name,  
 your kingdom come,  
 your will be done,  
 on earth as in heaven.  
 Give us today our daily bread.  
 Forgive us our sins  
 as we forgive those who sin against us.  
 Save us from the time of trial  
 and deliver us from evil.  
 For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
 now and forever. Amen.**

**Closing Hymn:     Go Make a Diff'rence (MV209)**

**Commissioning and Benediction:**

Having been loved into being by our Creator  
**We go forth to love as we are loved.**  
 Having received Grace from our brother Jesus Christ,  
**We go forth to offer grace to all those we meet.**  
 Knowing we are held and sustained by the Holy Spirit,  
**We go forth to offer care and compassion to those most  
 vulnerable**

So let us go forth with a daring and courageous love  
 The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the  
 communion of the Holy Spirit be with you today and forever more.  
 Amen.

## **Musical Postlude**

***This service and message was prepared by Krystal Sheremeta, President-Elect of Conference. Work on the liturgy for the Service of Praise also included President of Conference John Haas; Conference Executive Secretary Bill Doyle; Rob Reed and Tricia Gerhard.***

***The hymns are taken from More Voices and Voices United but substitutions may be made depending on the resources of the community.***