**A Tableau for Pentecost**

Here is an example of a Pentecost play that can be adapted for your context.

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This version of the play has been edited by Canadian Ministries.

**I. The Apostles: Peter and Paul**

**NARRATOR:** The drama of the celebration of Pentecost is recorded in the 2nd chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. When many people were gathered in Jerusalem for the traditional Jewish festival of ‘Shavuot,’ some astonishing things happened that brought new meaning to the long-practiced tradition. While God’s people were celebrating the giving of the religious law to Moses, the Holy Spirit descended on them. This event, which we celebrate as Pentecost, is known as the birth of the Christian church.

The foundation of the Church is built on the Spirit who empowers us. Pentecost is about receiving power from God to do things we could never do on our own. At Pentecost, we are reminded that the church was founded on the bedrock of reconciliation – the reconciliation of God to humanity and the reconciliation of each of us to one another. When God’s people are together, we find unity in our diversity through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**SCRIPTURE READER:** *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and rested on each one. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.* (Acts 2: 1 – 4, NRSV)

**DANCERS WITH (Red & Gold) STREAMERS ENTER AND CIRCLE SANCTUARY**

**SCRIPTURE READER:***At the rushing sound the crowd gathered and were bewildered because each one heard people speaking in their native language. Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans from many regions? How is it that we hear them in our own language speaking about God’s deeds of power?’ All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’* (Acts 2: 2, 4, 7-8, 12 – 13, NRSV adapted)

**VOICE #1:** The ApostlePeter stood up and reassured the people that the Prophet Joel had told the people of Israel that one day God’s Spirit would fall on everyone. As promised, God would be their deliverer and bless both the people and their land. Those hearing Peter’s words started to understand that what they had experienced was a sign God’s Spirit was still active in the world. Fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, they were on the receiving end of a miracle. God’s Spirit would continue to inspire and empower people who called on God’s name through Christ.

Those who were gathered and received the power of the Holy Spirit were then commissioned to go into the world to reveal what became known as the “divine disturbance.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Their experience and the message that they spread about it brought diverse people together —the Christian community that we now recognize as the origins of the church.

**Instrumental Music Transition: *Breathe on me breath of God***

**NARRATOR:** Join us as we travel through history to hear from men and women who were filled with the Holy Spirit. They responded to God’s call in faithful ways that changed their lives, influenced the world and shaped the Christian Church. Let us begin our journey with the Apostle Paul whose encounter with the Spirit of God not only changed his name, but also his way of life.

**SCRIPTURE READER:** *“While Saul was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, he went to the High Priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to ‘the Way’, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was travelling along, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”* (Acts 9: 1 – 4, NRSV adapted)

**VOICE #2:** This unexpected encounter with the risen Christ transformed Paul’s life. Initially, he was left blind by the flash of light, but shortly regained physical sight as well as newfound spiritual sight. After much prayerful contemplation, support and instruction from other Christians, he became one of them. His faith changed him and he became known as Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles who travelled to Philippi, Ephesus and Corinth to preach, instruct and establish new congregations.

Paul preached the good news of Jesus Christ at all costs. His missionary activities led to frequent arrests and imprisonment until he was executed under the rule of Nero in the year 68 AD. One of the Apostle Paul’s remaining legacies is authorship of a number of New Testament letters that form the foundational interpretation of the Christian message.

**SCRIPTURE READER: …** *the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace, and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.* (Acts 9:31, NRSV)

**Congregation: *When the spirit of the Lord* Book of Praise #** **398**

**II. Constantine and Augustine**

**NARRATOR:** Movingahead about 250 years, we meet the first Christian Emperor of Rome.

**VOICE #1:** Constantine was born the son of a Roman army officer who became an Emperor. He campaigned with his father and, after his father’s death, succeeded him as Emperor. He engaged in many battles and it took great strength to hang on to his position.

During one campaign, around 312, an unusual event occurred. Constantine saw a vision of the cross of Jesus superimposed on the sun, accompanied by the words: “In this sign conquer.”

**DANCERS WITH STREAMERS ENTER AND CIRCLE THE SANCTUARY**

After the blazing encounter, Constantine pledged himself to Christianity. In 313, he formally recognized Christianity as one of the religions within the Roman Empire. In 324, he became the sole Roman emperor and moved the capitol Rome to Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople and is known now as Istanbul.

Constantine was often accused of being an opportunist rather than a sincere Christian. Yet, God works through our brokenness and inspired Constantine to call the Council of Nicaea in 325, where the Nicene Creed was written. The Nicene Creed is a foundational piece of Christian doctrine that is still proclaimed in many Christian churches around the world today.

Constantine’s legacy as a ruler was shaped by his encounter with the cross of Christ on the battlefield. Although his story, with its many bloody battles, can be difficult for us to understand in our contemporary context, we recognize that his encounter with Christ forever changed the course of Christian history. Constantine was unable to realize his dream of being baptized in the Jordan River like Jesus, but he was baptized on his deathbed in 337.

**NARRATOR:** When two Roman emperors, Constantine and Licinius, jointly proclaimed the Edict of Milan in 313, religious freedom was then guaranteed for the Christian Church within the Roman Empire. Christian thought, studies and writings then began to flourish.

**Instrumental Music Transition: *Breathe on me breath of God***

**VOICE #2:** Augustine is one of the most well-known and well-loved early Christian writers.. As a young man he went to study in Rome, and under the influence of Bishop Ambrose he converted to Christianity. He was ordained as a priest and later appointed the Bishop of Hippo, in North Africa. His legacy as an author continues. Two of his books, originally written in Latin and translated into English, ***The Confessions of St. Augustine*** and ***The City of God***, laid a firm foundation for Christian intellectual thought.

**SCRIPTURE READER:** *Only God’s Spirit gives new life. The Spirit is like the wind that blows*

*but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going.* (John 3:8, CEV)

**Congregation: *O holy dove of God descending* Book of Praise # 392**

**III. Reformers Luther and Calvin**

**NARRATOR:** The consistent prodding of God’s Spirit came to Reformers as they studied the scriptures.

**VOICE #1:** Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany in 1483. He began his career as a lawyer, but at 21 heard the call of God and trained as an *Augustinian* monk. After he was ordained he began teaching at the University of Wittenberg and in 1512 attained a doctorate in theology. Through studying the scriptures, he became alarmed with what many saw as corruptions of the Roman Church, such as the selling of indulgences – the practice of paying the church to have your sins forgiven. These practices ran counter to the teachings of Paul, who claimed salvation only through faith in Jesus Christ

**SCRIPTURE READER: …** *people are justified to God because they have faith and not because they obey the works prescribed by customary rules. God’s call is to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference. Everyone has sinned and is far away from God’s saving presence. Yet, the free gift of God’s grace sets us free.* (Romans 3:22-24, GNT adapted)

**VOICE #1 CONTINUES:** Martin Luthercontinued to write and preach on freedom in Christ. Eventually, his words came to the attention of the church hierarchy. Despite being challenged by church authorities, Martin Luther held firm to his convictions about where salvation is found. As a result, he was pronounced an outlaw and a heretic and was excommunicated.

**NARRATOR:** While it was not Dr. Luther’s intention to fracture the Roman Catholic Church, only to reform it, a split took place and two groups arose – Protestant and Catholic. The emergence of one protesting section became known as Lutheranism, with Martin Luther as its influential leader. As a scholar of scripture, Dr. Luther left a complete translation of the Bible in German and also was the composer the well-known hymn, ‘A Mighty Fortress is Our God’.

**Instrumental Music Transition: *A mighty fortress is our God***

**VOICE #2:** The spirit of reform that began with Martin Luther in Germany influenced a French-born lawyer and theologian, living in Switzerland, named Jean Chauvin. This reformer became the leader of the reformation in Geneva, wrote a theological system known as Calvinism, and a book on church government. When his preaching and teaching reached Britain, his name was anglicized to John Calvin. His writings on Presbyterianism became the basis of faith adopted in Scotland, parts of Switzerland, and The Netherlands. This Reformed tradition came to the New World with French and Swiss Huguenots, and later settlers from Hungary and Scotland. The migration of these people eventually led to the formation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

**SCRIPTURE READER:** The *Spirit of God will be given to everyone. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions.* (Acts 2:17, CEV adapted, based on Joel 2:28)

**Congregation: *Send us your Spirit* Lift Up Your Hearts Hymnal #228**

**IV. Fanny Crosby and Harriet Tubman**

**NARRATOR:**  Closer to our time, Fanny Crosby—a determined and talented musician from the early 19thC—walked closely with God. Through her spirit-filled music, she inspired a generation and helped to bring many people to the faith during the ‘2nd Great Awakening’ revivalist movement in North America.

**DANCERS WITH STREAMERS ENTER AND CIRCLE THE SANCTUARY**

**VOICE #1:** Fanny Crosby was born in 1820 in Brewster, New York. Shortly after birth, she became very ill and an incorrect treatment left her blind. Her father died when she was young and her mother was forced to go to work. Her grandmother became her guide and greatly influenced her with her love of poetry and the Christian faith. Fanny developed her faith by memorizing chapters of the Bible, which she then used to write poems and hymns.

Fanny attended the New York Institute for the Blind as a student and later as a teacher. She married Alexander van Alstyne in 1858. He was an organist and wrote the music to many of the hymns she composed. Fanny Crosby died in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1915, a month before her 95th birthday. She wrote more than 9,000 hymns – many written under pen names “so hymnals would not be filled with her name.” She became known as the ‘Queen of Gospel Song Writers,’

**SCRIPTURE READER:***Clap your hands, all you people; sing to God with loud songs of joy. Let every living creature praise the Lord.* (Psalm 47:1, NRSV and Psalm 150:6 CEV)

**Instrumental Music Transition: *Blessed assurance***

***SCRIPTURE READER:*** *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners.* (Isaiah 61:1, NRSV – also see Luke 4:18)

**NARRATOR:** The horrors of slavery left a harmful legacy that continues to be felt across the world. Sadly, many of the people who supported and contributed to the slave trade in America called themselves Christians. Fortunately, there were others who felt strongly that the Holy Spirit was calling them to stand up against slavery. Several of the people forging the path to freedom were themselves former slaves. One particular woman, Harriet Tubman, became a well-known Abolitionist who used her faith as the basis of her cry for freedom.

**VOICE #2:** Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in Maryland around 1820. While in her teens, she managed to escape slavery and travelled to Pennsylvania, a free state, where she could hardly believe her new freedom. Not satisfied with her own freedom, she made many trips to the South to deliver fellow slaves to freedom. This path to freedom became known as the Underground Railway. Mrs. Tubman claimed that she “never lost a passenger” while making many trips North to deliver over 300 slaves. She was nicknamed “Moses” as she conducted the human network to freedom.

When bounty was put out in the North for slaves caught to be returned to slavery, Harriet Tubman forged a new path for her riders to Canada. The source of her strength came from her faith in God as Deliverer and Protector. Harriet Tubman was a devout Christian who was a practicing member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She made a promise to God: “I am going to hold steady on you, and you have got to see me through.”

**NARRATOR:** After the Civil War, Harriet Tubman settled in New York State and continued working to help former slaves. She died in 1913 at the age of 93. Her name has recently been in the news as she will be pictured on the American twenty-dollar bill – the first African American to be honoured on American currency. It is expected to be issued in 2020.

**READER:** In the 16th Century, Teresa of Avila wrote this poem.

*Christ has no body but yours.*

*No hands, no feet on earth but yours.*

*Yours are the eyes through which he looks*

*compassion on this world.*

*Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.*

*Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.*

*Yours are the hands, the feet, the eyes, you are his body.*

*Christ has no body now on earth, but yours.*

**Congregation: *Spirit of gentleness* Book of Praise # 399**

**V. Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King Jr.**

**NARRATOR:** A small woman heard the call of God, prepared herself to serve others and established a network to reach the disadvantaged.

**VOICE #1:** Agnes Bojaxhiu *(pronounced: bo-ax-hee- yu)* was born in Skopje, Albania. At the age of 18, having felt called to serve God, she joined a group of nuns in Ireland.Several years later, she went to India and began working as a teacher. There, her life changed: she took the name Mother Teresa, became an Indian citizen and founded the Missionaries of Charity. This Order provided aid to abandoned children and dying patients who needed special care. Mother Teresa believed very strongly that serving others was a key principle of the teachings of Jesus. Gradually the work that she started with the Missionaries of Charity in India expanded to 700 missions in over 130 countries.

**NARRATOR:** Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. She left us her famous motto: “Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.”

**Instrumental Music Transition: *Breath on me breath of God***

**NARRATOR:** The 1960s were a time of civil unrest in the United States due to a longstanding history of racial inequality. As people began to demand justice and equality for African Americans, there were protests, confrontations and political disruptions. Out of this milieu, emerged a powerful African American leader named Martin Luther King Jr. From the moment he made his first speech, it was obvious that the Holy Spirit was at work in him.

**VOICE #2:** Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1929, the son of a Baptist minister. In one of his sermons, he recalled how the early years of his life were fulfilling. With loving and concerned parents who provided for his needs, he went through high school, college, theological and graduate school without interruption. It was not until he became part of the leadership of the Montgomery bus protest that he was confronted with threats to his life. Despite this, he continued to campaign for civil rights, advocating for racial equality through nonviolent resistance. In 1963, he was one of the organizers of the massive March on Washington to advocate for voting rights for African Americans. In the midst of the tension in his life and work, King declared: “The ringing testimony of the Christian faith is that God is able.”

**NARRATOR:** Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. While attending an event

in 1968, he was assassinated. In honour of his work to gain full human rights, his birthday is now observed as a public holiday in some parts of the United States.

**SCRIPTURE READER:***A blessing from the book of Jude, was often delivered by Dr. King: “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* (Jude 1:24-25)

NARRATOR: The same Spirit that gathered the early Christians also works in us and through our church communities today. As we celebrate Pentecost, let us go into the world remembering the stories of those who have come before us.

**Congregation: *We are one in the spirit***  Book of Praise # 471

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***At this point, the offerings of the people are gathered and dedicated with prayer, following which the people are sent forth with a benediction.***

**Sources**

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1. - *Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)