



Presbyterians Sharing Sunday 2023 Worship Resource

WELCOME

Today we are marking Presbyterians Sharing, a time to celebrate the mission and ministry we do together in Canada and worldwide.

In the church, we share in supporting a wide range of ministries. We build strong congregations, seek justice, serve vulnerable people, walk with Indigenous people and share God's love around the world.

Today, we remember and celebrate that our congregation, through The Presbyterian Church in Canada, is connected by faith, history and mission, and we continue Christ's ministry in our communities and worldwide.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Let all who take comfort in God's Spirit rejoice;

All: let us all experience echoes of this joy.

One: Let all who follow Jesus rejoice;

All: and share this love with neighbours near and far.

One: Let all who trust in the Creator's abundant bounty rejoice;

All: and work together so that they may experience this bounty, today and tomorrow.

One: When we put our gifts in God's hands,

All: God does remarkable things!

One: Come, let us worship God.

All: We will worship God together.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jeremiah 29:4-14

Psalm 46

Ephesians 4:1-16

SUGGESTED HYMNS

#480 – In Christ there is no east or west

#484 – The church is wherever God's people

#475 – I am the church

#491 – God bless your church with strength

#726 – May the God of hope go with us every day

#748 – Lord of all hopefulness

#755 – Go ye, go ye into the world

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Let us pray.

Holy God of glory and love,
you began creation,
bringing order out of chaos and beauty out of nothingness.

God of mercy and hope,
you began a new creation, raising Jesus Christ out of death.
and demonstrated your deep care for us
by renewing our lives through the living Christ
and the ongoing power of the Holy Spirit.

We praise and adore you.

Let us, your people created from water and the Spirit,
and called by Christ for mission and ministry,
join with all creation praising you for all the blessings
and gifts that you have given
through Jesus Christ, in union with the Holy Spirit,

Out of a desire to begin again with you and one another we confess our sins:

Gracious and loving God,
you demonstrated your deep care for us
by renewing our lives through the living Christ
and the ongoing power of the Holy Spirit.

God of abundance and grace,
we confess that we often live without gratitude.

You give abundantly and generously,
but we count what we lack and overlook what have.

You bless us with many gifts,
but we don't always use the gifts you have given us in your service.

Forgive who we have been,
amend who we are and direct who we shall be,
forming us more and more in your image.

In a moment of silence, we continue our personal confessions.
(30-45 seconds of silence.)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

In Jesus Christ, the old has passed away and the new has come. The good news is that, because of God's resurrection power, death has died and sin is forgiven.

Hallelujah!

Amen.

CHILDREN'S TIME

Prepare: On 13 pieces of cardboard, write out the letters P R E S B Y T E R I A N S. On the back of each letter write the corresponding line of the poem below. On a larger piece of cardboard write, SHARING, in a similar size to PRESBYTERIANS. Read each line of the poem, handing a letter to a child as you read, so the congregation can see the word which is emerging. If you don't have enough children, engage the adults in the congregation or tack the letters up so that everyone can read them. As you read the final line, add the SHARING card, so people see PRESBYTERIANS SHARING.

Read: Our congregation gives some of the offerings we collect every Sunday to *Presbyterians Sharing*. These gifts are used to support the mission and ministry we do together in Canada and around the world. Listen to a few of the things we are doing with Presbyterians across Canada:

P is for **p**raying to God, it's agreed
R's **r**eaching out to people in need
E's for **e**vangelize, which also means teach
S is for **s**ending out people to preach
B is for **b**uilding congregations with care
Y is for **y**outh and the dreams that they share.
T's for **t**ranslating the Bible, it's true
E is for **e**verything good that we do!
R is for **r**eturning our gifts to God
I is for **i**nternational work (that's abroad)
A is for **a**cting in kind, loving ways while being with others, at work and at play.
N is for **n**ational, east coast to west
S is for **SHARING** – the thing we do **best!**

As we work *together* through *Presbyterians Sharing* we share God's love with people in all kinds of places, in many different ways.

Prayer: Loving God, thank-you for giving us gifts that we can share with others. Help us work together to share your love and hope in our community, in our country and around the world. AMEN

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

O Lord, by the power of your Spirit, open our hearts and our minds to your Word.
Teach us your ways and give us the grace to follow them.
Give us understanding to see the world as you do.
Give us hearts to love others as you do.
And give us the wisdom to discern
how to best live as followers of Jesus, your Living Word.

SERMON: PUTTING OUR GIFTS IN GOD'S HANDS

I think we can be forgiven if we are feeling a little uncertain these days.

We've just come through a pandemic that has changed the way we look at and experience the world. We've been through three years of isolation and uncertainty and the anxiety, grief and anger that accompanied it.

We are facing changing economic times. Costs are rising faster than wages and the news is full of warnings of recession.

We live in an age where lying and deceit have become acceptable traits in politics and where companies too often put profits before people.

We see the consequences of a creation that has experienced years of exploitation and neglect as our climate becomes more and more unpredictable and catastrophic weather events hit communities around the world.

War and conflict in Ukraine, Syria, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, Somalia, Yemen and South Sudan – to name a few – have high numbers of casualties and are displacing populations.

Gangs and economic decline have caused people in many Latin American countries to leave for the prospect of brighter futures, only to be met by closed borders and hostile welcomes.

And that's just the big picture.

As communities and individuals, we are hurting. Some are struggling with finances. Some are stuck in painful relationships. Some struggle with mental health. Some are struggling with physical health. Some feel they can check off "all of the above." With many different stories and circumstances, we have come through and are going through hard times.

In hard times, it can be difficult to see where God is. Peace, hope and faith seem a long way off. The number of people who come together to worship and follow Christ in communities and congregations across Canada has declined and those of us who remain often wonder how we can continue to be faithful followers of Christ in a world we don't understand.

This is a common theme in the Bible. The people of God go through tumultuous times again and again and again. They doubt. They fear. They question God. And they are scared to do anything. Today, in the passage from Jeremiah, we hear their lament.

It is a little over five hundred years before the birth of Jesus. The people of God are in exile in Babylon, an alien land and a hostile environment. The prophet Jeremiah has told them that their exile will last for 70 years, more than a lifetime for many of them. And yet, in the same breath, he tells them that God has plans for their welfare.

"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not harm, to give you a future with hope."

Think of what Jeremiah's words must have meant to the people of Israel – a people who have given up and don't know what to do.

Jeremiah has given them instructions on how they should live through this time of exile: build houses, plant gardens, marry, and have children. Continue to pray, seek God and work for the welfare of the place they find themselves in. In other words, get on with living. Don't stop being the people of God because you are in exile, because times are uncertain, because you are afraid – and better things will come.

Choose faith over fear.

This wasn't easy for the people.

Jeremiah was asking them to choose hope over despair,
faith over fear.

And it's not easy for us. Fear is a natural reaction to uncertainty. We face big, overwhelming challenges. We wonder how our actions can make a difference. We think we aren't good enough, that we aren't enough to make a difference.

It can be easier to allow fear to envelop us and do nothing at all.

But fear doesn't have to motivate the way we act.

We can choose to act out of faith instead of fear, even when we are afraid.

Instead of inaction, we can let hope motivate our actions.

When I hear this scripture, I hear God saying:

“Live as I have taught you, and I promise you a future of hope.”

Even in hard times, even in uncertain and chaotic times, we can build houses, plant gardens, find partners, and have children. We can find ways to stop and see the joy around us: smell the flowers, savour the sweetness of the fruit that is in season, hold hands as we watch the sunset. We can stop and listen to people's joys and sorrow and help those in need. We can work together on projects that will help each other. We can participate in rites of passage: graduations, weddings, funerals – and take note of the milestones of life. We can plant trees for the future and work for the welfare of others and the place we call home.

And with each action, we can pray, seek God.

We don't always know where God is leading
or how we will get there, but we know that God is faithful.

Choosing faith as a church community

Strength and energy come when we stand together, work together, share together, commune together, laugh together, cry together. God reminds us again and again that we NEED one another. In community, there is strength.

Congregations across Canada sharing the gospel in word and action are vibrant expressions of God's love. Together we live out our faith, in our communities and around the world. In times of crisis and chaos and uncertainty, the message of the gospel—hope, peace, joy and love—is needed so much. It is needed now.

We do not stand still, paralyzed by fear.

Supporting and equipping congregations is at the core of *Presbyterians Sharing*. When we give to Presbyterians Sharing, we provide materials and resources to help congregations in faithful ministry even through these challenging times.

We equip leaders through theological colleges, conferences and learning opportunities. We are helping congregations live out new dreams by providing coaches and mentors who share their experiences and perspectives. We are providing grants that help start new faith communities, launch new congregations and renew established ones.

Together we face difficult questions: Where is God calling us? What is the Holy Spirit equipping us to do today? How do we reach people who are skeptical of institutions and, even more, of organized religion?

It takes courage to see and address the pressing needs in our communities. With smaller numbers, we can no longer do things the way we have always done things. It takes physical, mental, and spiritual energy to change and learn new things. We find ourselves changing our routines, sharing our spaces and redirecting our resources.

Sometimes it is helpful to remember that our church history is steeped in the tradition of being reformed and always reforming. It is our history and culture to step out of our comfort zones, try new things and witness to the resurrection of Christ in fresh new ways.

This is why we come together in our churches.

This is why our churches come together in our denomination.

Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing help us navigate these uncertain times. When we put our gifts into God's hands, God does incredible things; things that we can't do on our own.

We have national and regional staff and volunteers who help congregations see where the Holy Spirit may be leading them by examining their history and culture and helping them to identify their strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

Let me share with you one small example.

Erskine Presbyterian Church in Hamilton has been through hard times and even considered closing its doors. With support from Presbyterians Sharing, they have worked hard to look at the needs around them and develop ways of reaching out and bringing their community inside the church. They share that God has been working through them as they see new people come through their doors: “Some have been living in Strathcona for years, some are new to the area. Some have a Christian upbringing; some say they knew they needed something but did not know what it is. The wonderful news is these people have not simply come for one service and left. *Many* have decided to stay and are calling Erskine their home church. They are slowly becoming involved with groups at the church. God is truly doing something new at Erskine.”

Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing help congregations reshape and redefine their ministries. Together, we share experiences from across the country as we discern new ways of ministry into the future. We are discovering the courage and language to start conversations about difficult issues like mental and spiritual well-being. We are learning how to care for one another better. We are leading our communities in caring for creation and responding to injustice.

Together, in faith

General Assembly both supported by gifts to Presbyterians Sharing and is the place where the decisions about what our gifts to Presbyterians Sharing will support.

Meeting In person for the first time in four years, the 2023 Assembly offered many opportunities for Presbyterians from across Canada to talk to each other and be together in worship. It was a time to reflect on our church and its mission and ministry. A time of reframing how the church thinks of itself, sharing stories and seeing the many examples of hope, courage and commitment of those who gather in our congregations.

Decisions were made to engage with difficult issues in our world and continue building a church where ALL are welcome to bring and share the gifts God has given us and participate in God’s mission together.

We made commitments to advocate for the human rights of Palestinians and the LGBTQI+ community. We decided to work on resources to support ministers faced with pastoral issues related to Medical Assistance in Dying, while, at the same time, calling on the Government of Canada to consider the value, dignity, worth and right to life of disabled persons, the poor and the marginalized within the context of MAID.

With the installation of the Rev. Mary Fontaine, the PCC’s first Indigenous Moderator, we again reflected on the harm the church has caused Indigenous people. Mary shared some of the hurt and the anger she has experienced as well as her personal journey of letting go of anger and learning to love the church again.

During the Assembly, the National Indigenous Ministries Committee echoed the ongoing challenges and struggles of communities that continue to live the traumatic inter-generational legacy of residential schools and colonialism. And the church listened, with delegates committing to working on a renewed apology this coming year.

At the same time, we heard of the impact the NIMC ministries are having with the support of gifts to Presbyterians Sharing. Winnipeg Inner City Mission's annual report gives a small glimpse into the impact they are having.

"Norman, one of our residents, has faced many hardships in life, including childhood trauma, substance abuse, criminal history, and homelessness. Through WICM's programs, he began connecting with the Creator and experiencing His grace and compassion. This caused a great transformation in Norman's life. He is now sober, proudly pursuing education, and continuing to foster his relationship with God.

Spirituality and one's relationship with God is a personal journey that we are honoured to be able to witness and help support in others...We see God transforming lives in our community through everyday moments of success and joy, both large and small. Whether it be a child feeling proud of their garden successfully blooming, an adult enrolling in classes to finish their high school diploma, or a staff member preparing a homecooked meal for program participants, we are blessed to experience these moments of hope and can attest to the tremendous impact they have in changing the lives of the people we serve."

God is calling us to do be God's people
in this challenging world in which we live, here and now.

We wait expectantly

As the story in Jeremiah continues, it's not like things get any easier.

The feelings of brokenness, loss and abandonment continue as the people experience the trauma of exile and having to rebuild their lives. However, those feelings were held in the hands of a loving God who never let go.

Maybe, like the people in the time of Jeremiah, we recognize that we are also waiting. Not a listless, despondent, sitting on our hands doing nothing kind of waiting, but an expectant kind of waiting, where we pause, reflect and listen. Where we don't assume we have all the answers, leaping into action.

The coming of God's realm takes time. God's time.

God promises renewal for God's people.

God has reaffirmed God's love and purpose in our lives.

So we wait expectantly on the God who promised new life for Jeremiah's people.
We wait expectantly on deep, rooted, strong, unshakable promises,
on a an ever-faithful God, who often surprises
and sometimes overwhelms us.
And we do it together.

And as we wait,
living lives filled with faithful action,
walking on this journey together,
we can feel fear and excited expectation,
we can experience joys and sorrows,

We can pray and share our hopes and fears and joys and sorrows with God.
And we can be patient and see where God is leading us
– as individuals, congregations and denominations.

And as we put God's gifts in God's hands, God will do remarkable things.
We've been promised so.

Amen.

CALL TO OFFERING

Loving God, through our gifts, we proclaim how much you have done for us and allow your work to be done. Let our giving reflect our choice to live as Christ taught us, sharing love, faith and hope with people in our community and around the world. Through these offerings, we share our blessings in God's name.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

God of hope, we give you our thanks for the many gifts that we enjoy.
Bless these gifts we have given. May our offerings both here and in every part of our lives — our time, our talents and our money — work towards building a world filled with hope, both through the ministries of our congregation and through God's mission carried out by what we do together.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE

Mighty God, we come before you in prayer as your people
You know us in our moments of joys and our moments of sorrows.
You know us in our strength and in our weakness.
You know us when we are wise and when we are foolish.
You love us for who we are.

God of Mercy,

Open our hearts to see the needs around us,
open our hands to share generously with others and
use our lives to further your reign,
within your church and around the world.

Merciful God, we bring before you now the cares and concerns of this congregation.
(Include your congregational prayers here.)

We also pray for our community outside these walls.
(Include specific prayers for your community here.)

Compassionate God, we pray for the leaders in our country: mayors and Premiers, Prime Minister and Cabinet leaders. We pray for business leaders who employ people and provide goods and services across our country. We pray for leaders around the world, of countries and multi-national corporations. We pray that you may instill wisdom and compassion in their hearts, as they govern – and that they may always see the impact their decisions have on the lives of people every day.

Bless our leaders, we pray.

Loving God, we pray for our church and for the many people who are part of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We pray for ministers and lay leaders, elders and Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders and members of hospitality teams, stewardship teams and the Board of Managers. May we be examples, through word and deed, of the love of God that we know in Jesus Christ.

Bless your church, we pray.

Gracious God, we pray for the ministries supported through Presbyterians Sharing. For our international partners working to share the good news around the world. For ministries in Canada serving inner cities and rural and remote communities, university students, refugees, victims of human trafficking and others.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

Merciful God, we pray for the ministries of the National Indigenous Ministries Council. We pray for the volunteers and staff who work in their ministries. We pray for the communities that they serve. We pray for all who have been impacted by the legacy of the residential schools that took Indigenous children from their homes and taught them

they weren't worthy to speak their language or live their culture. We pray for all who are part of this history because of where and how we live today. We pray that you accompany us on journeys of healing and reconciliation.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

We pray for staff and volunteers in regional and national offices who provide support for congregations, presbyteries and synods in their various ministries. For those who write letters, march with signs and speak wisely on matters of justice, care and compassion for our world. For the students, faculty and staff at our theological colleges who seek to understand and apply the Word of God to their current and future ministry. For the General Assembly, its courts and committees, serving the church so that we may remain faithful and strong in our witness to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Bless these workers, we pray.

O God, for the joy of participating in the reconciling and transforming work of Jesus Christ, we give you thanks. We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray:

Our Father...

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (*Colossians 3:15-17, NRSV*)

And now glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Karen Plater, Associate Secretary for Stewardship & Planned Giving, has prepared this liturgy. Feel free to copy and adapt for use in your congregation.