



Presbyterians Sharing Sunday 2022 Worship Resource

WELCOME

Today is Presbyterians Sharing Sunday.

Today, we celebrate the mission and ministry we do together through Presbyterians Sharing, The Presbyterian Church in Canada's national fund that supports mission and ministry in Canada and around the world. Through Presbyterians Sharing, Presbyterians across Canada share in a wide range of ministries.

Together, we build strong congregations, serve vulnerable people, walk with Indigenous people, seek justice and share God's love around the world.

Today, we remember and celebrate the fact that our congregation is not alone. We are part of a larger body. As members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada we belong to a denomination that is connected by faith, governance, history and mission.

Together, we are using gifts given by God to carry out Christ's ministry in our communities and around the world. Together, we are accomplishing so much more than we ever could on our own.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 96

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-5:1

SUGGESTED HYMNS

We are one in the spirit – 471

The church's one foundation – 479

Blest be the tie that binds – 481

God bless your church with strength – 491

Christ you call us all to service – 585

Sent forth by your blessing – 775

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today's Call to Worship comes from the experience of worship in Presbyterian churches in Malawi. While not unique to them, it is common for our partner, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, to include something like this in their worship. It is both an affirmation and a promise which allows us to joyously enter into God's presence. It is a call and response done with enthusiasm.

***As you say the final "Whoo!" people need to throw their hands up in the air. The "Whoo" could also be a "Wow!" or something similar. You may want to repeat this a few times so that people can get into the rhythm.**

One: God is good!

All: All the time!

One: All the time!

All: God is good!

All: And that is God's nature. Whoo!

PRAYER OF ADORATION

God of all nations,

your glory is incomprehensible,

your majesty, infinite.

Your love is wider than all the universe.

All the earth sings your praises,

and we join our voices in praise and adoration of you as one God,

the creating God,

loving Son

and the Holy Spirit.

Teach us a new song,

remind us of your salvation,

so that we might praise your name.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

As we recall who you are,
We know that we sin and fall short of your glory.
There are things that we should say that we don't,
and other things that we say but shouldn't.
There are things that we should do but don't,
and things we do but shouldn't.
At times, we forget about your presence in our lives,
living as if you were not the God who saves.
Yet, when we look to you, we see your steadfast love,
and know that in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray,
We are forgiven.
Amen

RESPONSE

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 STORY

This story requires participation from the congregation. Before worship, arrange with 3-4 adult worshippers to have cups or bottles of water available. Likewise, 2-3 worshippers should be ready to say that they need some water for various purposes. Have some fun with it!

1. Thirst (e.g., oh, you know, I'm really thirsty right now)
2. Plants (e.g., my tomatoes could really use some water right now)
3. Washing (e.g., I need to wash my plates and utensils so I have something clean to eat off or
Mmm, my clothes are kind of dirty so I could use some water to wash them or (for the braver)
Uh, I think that, you know, I'm kind of, uh, stinky. I could use some water to wash up)

When the children come forward, hold some kind of clear and empty water container (a pitcher etc.). Start by saying something like:

Did you know that there are children, just like you, around the world who don't have water in their houses? They have to go and get it from somewhere else. Sometimes they have to walk for hours! Doesn't that sound hard? I mean, if you wanted to fill this pitcher up, what would you do? [responses something like "go to the tap"]. Right. But what if you didn't have a tap? [get some suggestions].

I wonder how we could fill this pitcher up? [this is the cue for your accomplices in the congregation to offer their water e.g., "Oh, I have this water bottle. I haven't drunk from it yet so you could have it." It could get ridiculous depending on how comfortable your accomplices are e.g., "uh, well, I was going camping so I have this big thing of water. Do you want it?" At each offer, dispatch one of the children to retrieve the water. Try to have at least one container that is too large for one child (so it requires a couple of carriers). You can note that sometimes it seems to take a team to gather all the water. As they return, fill the pitcher up.]

Awesome, now that we've got our pitcher full, we are done. Let us pray [before you launch into a prayer, have an accomplice interrupt you. "Uh, pastor, I'm actually quite thirsty. The water at my house was out. Do you think I could have some?" Have a child deliver a glass of water. Follow with the others who need water.]

Wow. Did you see what happened there? We started with an empty pitcher. Then, some people had more water than they needed so they gave it to us. Other people did not have enough water so we gave it to them. And you were very helpful in doing a lot of running back and forth. It took all of us, working together, doing different things, to make it all work.

In worship today we are talking about something called Presbyterians Sharing. It is a little bit like what just happened. There are people who go to church all across Canada. Each week they give some money [if your congregation has particular practices about collecting offering note those. For example, you might point to the plates and talk about the ushers collecting the offering. Or pointing to the offering basket at the back of the sanctuary.] When we collect it all together, like we did with water in the pitcher, we use it to help people who need it.

God wants us to show our love for each other. One of the ways we do that is by giving money to Presbyterians Sharing so that others can receive a gift.

Let's pray:

God, we give thanks for what you have given us. Help us to give back to others. We pray for generous hearts so we can give cheerfully, wise minds so we can make good decisions, and strong hands so we can do your work, in this, your world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SERMON: Unity in Knowledge and Love

Today we read a passage from Paul's letter to the followers of Jesus at Ephesus. On an almost daily basis, the news makes this passage needed. We live in polarized times filled with conspiracy theories and lacking human decency. Blame social media, blame certain politicians, blame ideological trends or whatever you want, but unity, truth, and charity seem in short supply right now.

Ephesians points us in the opposite direction. We live in conflict; the passage emphasizes unity. Against conspiracy theories stands truth. Incivility gets countered with grace.

These times pose a challenge to Christians. Like the first line of the passage which tells us, "To lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called". These times challenge us to be unified, truthful, and charitable when so much pushes us in the opposite direction.

That's all well and nice you might say, but what does this have to do with Presbyterians Sharing? Everything. For starters, the passage emphasizes the message of unity. We are to "maintain the unity of the Spirit." Then comes a string of "ones". There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. For those counting, that's 7 ones in a single sentence. All of this oneness moves us "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." Unity leads to the full stature of Christ.

Amidst all of this unity we hear that the church contains the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Clearly, unity does not mean uniformity or sameness. Apostles serve different roles than prophets who do different things than evangelists and so on. Instead, it means that God gives a diversity of gifts to equip the church for its witness in the world. Lack a gift? The implication is that church

does not have the ability to reach the full stature of Christ. We need a unity in diversity to do all that God calls us to do.

In a polarized world like the one we live in we often mistake uniformity for unity. One group, which is all the same, goes against another group, which is all the same. We build the base of our people, intentionally excluding others so that we can have a unified front. Conservatives over here, progressives over there. Settlers over here, Indigenous people over there. English over here, French over there. Developed world over here, developing world over there.

Just because everyone is the same in our group does not mean that we have unity. Quite the opposite. We need each other. One congregation is not big enough to hold the diversity that God has given to the world. We might all look or sound similar, we may feel unified, but in reality, we lack gifts required to attain the full stature of Christ. Our uniformity, our sameness is not enough.

Even our denomination that stretches across the country is not big enough. Yes, we have many languages, many different theological views, many different worship styles and different priorities for mission, we do have diversity. But it is nothing compared to what we see in the global church.

Presbyterians Sharing, the denomination's budget, gathers our diverse gifts together and unifies us. Together we work towards reconciliation with and justice for Indigenous peoples. Together we connect young people at Canada Youth events. Together we partner with churches in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America in ways that help them and us flourish. No single congregation, no matter how active or big, can do these things. Presbyterians Sharing unifies us in diversity so our witness to the world is faithful to the calling God has placed on us.

The Letter to the Ephesians is also quite clear that unity in diversity requires knowledge. Knowledge guides love. We get warned that "we must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming." We are not to live in the "futility of our minds" but instead live lives worthy of the calling through having our minds renewed.

Education and knowledge have been a particular gift of Presbyterians worldwide. Through Presbyterians Sharing we not only support our theological colleges here in Canada (Presbyterian College in Montreal, Knox in Toronto, and St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver) but also schools like the Near East School of Theology in Lebanon and Zomba Theological College in Malawi.

Each of these schools trains ministers and other Christian leaders such as chaplains, but learning isn't only for the ordained. Since the mid 70's the PCC has supported Theological Education by Extension Malawi (TEEM). It focuses on equipping lay people and leaders with theological knowledge. On any given Sunday, lay preachers will fill up to 2/3 of the pulpits of our Malawian partner church, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. Millions of Presbyterians (there are approximately 35 times more Presbyterians in Malawi than in Canada) will hear a sermon preached by an elder so training them is extremely important.

TEEM can go where others cannot, such as in prisons. Friends of Prison is a Malawian ministry we support through Presbyterians Sharing. A group of volunteers regularly visits prisoners, bringing spiritual encouragement and practical help. But a visit is not the same as having a regular spiritual leader present. The Holy Spirit has used the volunteer visitors to change the hearts of prisoners. Despite their conversion, these prisoners don't get out of prison. Friends of Prison faced a dilemma: prisoners had become Christians but were unsupported in getting discipled in the faith. Enter TEEM. Volunteers, mostly from nearby Presbyterian churches, received training in offering the courses TEEM gives to elders. Subjects include introductions to the Bible and theology alongside practical classes like preaching and interfaith ministry. There is even a class on evil and exorcism as African leaders face this situation regularly! Now there are trained spiritual leaders in the prison, discipling their peers in true and good ways. This pilot project has expanded to 5 more prisons and has hired an ex-convict who came to faith through Friends of Prison to help lead it!

Knowledge is a slow and, therefore, expensive business. There are quick ways of gaining knowledge, but these rarely produce the kind of long-lasting discipleship that Ephesians speaks about. You can't go to a workshop and walk out competent to translate the Bible. The truth takes time to hear and learn. The truth takes humility. How do we react to a class about exorcism? How much does our reaction come from an assumption that we know what is right? Theological education in the 21st means we must humble ourselves to hear and consider and think through the experiences and understandings of a wide range of Christians. Humility means we might be wrong, in need of correction. It also means that we might be right but need to help others see that in ways that they can hear. The search for the truth is not easy or quick but, make no mistake, the truth matters.

Just one example. In many parts of the world they preach what is called prosperity "gospel". Prosperity "gospel" is a message that preys on the poor so is not Good News and does not deserve the name "gospel". It mixes just enough truth with deception to be believed. The prosperity message gives false hope all the while taking what little money the poor have. In many of our partner churches around the world, millions of Christians live and work next to charlatans and hucksters who teach the prosperity

message. Ministers, elders, and lay people need to know the truth of the Gospel because to live into the falsehood of the prosperity message has dire consequences for them. Presbyterians Sharing supports the needed ministry of seeking and telling the truth.

Of course, talking about faith is not enough. The third part of the Ephesians passage tells us this quite pointedly. We seek unity through knowledge, but we do so because we are to love God and one another. As Paul says in Corinthians, anything without love, including unity and truth, is just a clanging gong.

A life worthy of our calling is humble, gentle, patient. It bears with the other in love. If these qualities seem abstract, we learn that we should not live with hard hearts but with a sensitivity to the Spirit. We should speak the truth, work honestly, share with the needy, speak with grace. We should be gentle, tenderhearted, forgiving.

These very practical things – how we talk to each other, how we go about doing our work, how we live out our faith – start with knowing God’s love for us. Just before this passage, the prayer in Ephesians is “that you may have the power to *comprehend*, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to *know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge*, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Knowledge is of the love of Christ. It is a gift that comes from one God who we know in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Presbyterians Sharing is a practical form of love. Admittedly, giving money does not seem like a particularly spiritual or loving thing. But really, love is not love without some tangible expression. In the early 90’s Gary Chapmen published a book called *The Five Love Languages*. His basic thesis is that each person receives the tangible signs of love in different ways. He argues that some of us know we are loved when we receive gifts, others when we are hugged, and others when someone spends time with us. Whether he gets all of the details right or wrong, the subtitle of the book is essentially true: *How to Express Heartfelt Commitment*.

This is brilliant in its simplicity. If my significant other, child, co-worker, knows they are loved in a certain way, and I genuinely love them, I will express my love in such a way that they know it. Even though I might not be indifferent to receiving gifts, if someone else knows they are loved when they receive them, and I love them, I should discipline myself to find gifts for them. The way that I receive love is likely the default way I give love so I might need to change that to truly love someone else. This is a sacrifice because it is making me change. It is also a sacrifice because it makes the other person more important than myself.

In giving to Presbyterians Sharing, we create a unity in diversity. We open ourselves up to the truth that alone we are not sufficient. There is an incredible number of different things that happen because of Presbyterians Sharing but they all witness to the one God, one Lord, and one Spirit. There is an incredible number of ways that we can express love tangibly. But it is also true that while we might give sacrificially, we also receive the gifts of others.

Presbyterians Sharing is not a transactional relationship. This is not charity because there is no humility in charity. In charity the giver holds all the power which makes true unity in diversity impossible. It might appear loving to give without expectation of something in return but in that attitude, we wall ourselves off from the gifts of others and claim that we are self-sufficient. By giving to Presbyterians Sharing, we are not buying something. But we do receive something in return.

For instance, since 2000 the PCC has run Canada Youth events. One of the main parts of those events is worship. A great deal of energy, time, creativity, prayer, and talent go into making worship experiences profound for the young people gathered there. Consistently those times rank as a highlight for participants. These are worship times measured in hours not minutes, with full sermons and all the other elements you might experience in a Presbyterian church on a Sunday morning. And young people love it.

Presbyterians Sharing has supported worship experiences for thousands of young people over decades. This has value and is a sign of love. But it is not just young people that benefited. There is a kind of trickling-up economics at work. At one point the leadership of CY realized that local Presbyterians were sneaking into the service. The event could not accommodate all the adults who wanted to join but did try to provide resources for local congregations to worship in different ways. There was a hunger for this kind of worship. Participants at CY brought some of that energy, creativity, prayer, and talent back to their sending congregations. And over the decades the event has run, dozens of ministers and young people have worked together, honing the skills required to lead this kind of worship. Many have gone on to hold various leadership positions, benefitting the PCC. Gifts of money through Presbyterians Sharing transformed into gifts of love to young people. And in turn, those young people gave their own gifts of love back to the church.

In giving to Presbyterians Sharing, we seek the truth of the love of God in Jesus Christ. When we see that truth, God's grace becomes even more powerful. While we were yet sinners, God's grace came to us, setting us free from the lies and deceptions of sin. To seek the truth is to seek the love of God.

In giving to Presbyterians Sharing, we love others. We live into the admonishment that Ephesians ends today's passage with, words fitting as a charge to all of us: Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE

God, parent of all, we give you thanks for the many good gifts you give to your church.

You are always doing a new thing among us and we pray for those who face new things: new jobs, new circumstances, new relationships, new family – all good things but in their newness they can be frightening. Give us a sense of excitement as we move into your hopeful future.

In your church, we are grateful for those who hear your call and start new things, who form new faithful communities, who sense your leading and take chances of faith to follow where you lead. Strengthen your people through programs in the church that nurture new ways of reaching out and sharing your good news and how your hope takes shape in the world.

For all who work for justice and righteousness we pray. For all who face injustice and oppression we pray. You promise to be present in our suffering, so we humbly ask that you will reveal yourself to your servants so that they might have comfort and strength.

We are grateful for those who call us to lead more faithful lives. We pray for people in the church who work for justice, for healing, for reconciliation and those who help our communities reflect your inclusive grace. Guide us into ways that recognize and realize all people's gifts for ministry and service in the world.

We pray for the leaders in The Presbyterian Church in Canada who volunteer their time and give their talents to participate in committees and working groups, taking leadership in webinars and conferences. We pray for the convenors and members of the more than 40 committees and working groups under the General Assembly.

We are grateful for and pray for the leaders in this congregation. We pray for the lay leaders who give their time and energy to do mission and ministry in your name. [*Name the volunteer leaders in your congregation, the Sunday school teachers, the elders, the board of managers, the choir members, the mission society etc.*]

And we pray for ministers, especially [*name them; if you do not have a minister you may lift up a person who gives pastoral care to your congregation such as an elder*]. As they serve this congregation help them bind up the wounded, lead them to places of good health, and protect them from anything that stands in the way of their task.

We are grateful for those who bring a cup of water and the bread of salvation to those who need to know your Good News in Jesus Christ. We pray for people who serve in prisons in Canada and around the world. Infuse their words with the joy of salvation so that prisoners might know your grace through Jesus Christ, putting off the old life and taking up a new one.

For those whose actions hurt themselves and others,
who live in pain and woundedness,
who suffer in addiction,
we pray that they might find freedom and grace in your son Jesus Christ.

We are grateful for the teachers in our midst. We pray for the leaders and teachers in the church's colleges, and for the boards that govern them. We pray for theological educators the world over, that they might rightly share your Word in ways that bring your truth to your people. We pray for the students, who question and wonder and study your word, to reveal your mysteries. May your truth triumph over deception in humility and power.

We pray for those deceived by the lies of this world,
who strive for things other than you,
who fall prey to false teachings that lead them away from you,
and for those whose ignorance leads to hate and sin,
May your truth overcome deceit,
bring order to chaos
and bring healing and insight to your people.

For those who are grieving, sick, or facing broken relationships, and for those who are suffering or going through difficult times, we pray. [*Name anyone in your community who you know needs specific prayer*]
Through your church and your Holy Spirit provide comfort to them, lifting them up and caring for them with grace and mercy.

And in one voice, we pray together as Jesus taught us,

Our Father...

Amen.

BENEDICTION

May you be strengthened in your inner being through the Holy Spirit.

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith.

And may you be rooted and grounded in God's grace;

having the power to know the breadth and length

and height and depth of the love of Christ.

Go now, with the knowledge of the One

who is able to accomplish abundantly far more

than all we can ask or imagine.

Amen.

The 2022 Presbyterians Sharing Sunday resource was written by PCC mission staff, the Rev. Dr. Blair Bertrand, Malawi Liaison with the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in the Synod of Blantyre.

Based in Ottawa, Blair works with the Principal of Zomba Theological College, assisting with the development of curricula and policies of the College, developing the College's library and encouraging research and academic exchanges. At Theological Education by Extension in Malawi (TEEM), Blair assists with lay training materials, revisions to the diploma workbooks and development of lay Bible curricula.