

CELEBRATING SPIRIT

Service of Worship Celebrating the 55th Anniversary of UCW

By: Betty Turcott

INTROIT Breathe On Me Breath of God VU 382

CALL TO WORSHIP:

ONE: Spirit whispers.

ALL: We listen.

ONE: Spirit calls.

ALL: We answer.

ONE: Spirit beckons.

ALL: We respond.

ONE: Whisper to us above the confusion of our world

Call to us amid our noisy busy lives.

Beckon to us as we turn to follow the spirit.

Hear us as we celebrate the presence of the spirit in our worship.

PRAYER of Invocation

Spirit, you are in the wind. You surround us with light. You fill us with peace. In this time of quiet, may we hear your whisper and your call. Let us respond with joy as we are enfolded in the mystery of a loving God. Amen.

HYMN Spirit, Sprit of Gentleness VU 375

CHILDREN'S TIME. See appendix at the end for a suggestion

(If desired the UCW Purpose , Vision and Mission Statements could be read in unison)

SPECIAL MUSIC

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11 I Corinthians 12: 1-11

HYMN There's A Spirit in the Air VU 582

CELEBRATING SPIRIT

{The underlined words may be said in unison by the whole congregation}

The United Church Women's Organization is celebrating an anniversary. Fifty-five years of Witness, Study, Fellowship and Service. Since our earliest beginnings, many years before our actual formation, women have heard the spirit's call and have responded.

We name ourselves as Christian, part of the Christian family. Someone has described Christianity as a conversation that began long, long ago before we were a part of it. All through the ages people have joined the conversation, shared in it for a time, and left it. The

UCW, as an organization joined the conversation in 1962, but women of the church have been part of it since the beginning. Long after we leave, the conversation will continue. The spirit whispers, speaks, nudges and prods in many times, in many places and in many ways.

We are here today to celebrate that spirit. The spirit that hovered over creation. The spirit that spoke to the ancients in wind and fire. The spirit that called the prophets to proclaim God's message. The spirit that blazed anew at Pentecost. That same spirit still present, giving us strength, hope, and courage . Still beckoning us to respond. This same spirit challenged and strengthened the women who were there 55 years ago at the founding of the UCW. And it was not an easy task.

Change is never easy, we know that personally, as we face many changes in our church in this century. But God's people have always been called to follow the spirit into new adventures, new ways of being and doing, and that voice is calling us today. Sometimes she comes as a whisper, or a prayer. Sometimes in wind and fire, or in thunder and blazing light. But she comes and we respond. Perhaps with fear and reluctance. Perhaps with doubt and a desire to stay in the comfortable pew. But we respond to spirit's call with hope, love and faith.

In Isaiah we read that the spirit is creative and present. She offers us wisdom, counsel, knowledge and truth. No wonder they are called gifts of the spirit. And we celebrate them, present in our lives and in the UCW.

The Bible story tells us that Sara lived with her husband Abram, in Ur. They were probably quite content to live out their lives in this familiar place and to stay in the region of their ancestors. But it was not to be. They left their home and started on a long and arduous journey to a new land. Led by the Spirit? Yes. Celebrate Spirit with joy and thanksgiving

Johanna lived a life of comfort and ease. Chuza ,her husband, employed in the palace of Herod provided a good living for them. However, material comforts were not enough, she was lonely. Being Jewish she was not welcomed into the social life of the palace, and living and working in the palace she was not welcomed by the Jewish community. She found friendship and meaning for her life among the followers of the rabbi called Jesus. Led by the Spirit? Yes. Celebrate Spirit with joy and thanksgiving

We remember our foremothers who took great risks in standing for what they believed and then following through with long hours of prayerful struggle to gain a place for the work and the witness of women in the church. Led by the Spirit? Yes. Celebrate Spirit with joy and thanksgiving

Throughout our history there have been women who have led the way for us. Lydia Gruchy, Nellie McClung, Lois Wilson, Anne Squire, Marion Best, Marion Pardy, Mardi Tindall, Jordan Cantwell, Marion Logan, Deborah Marshall, Anne Martin, Dorothy Amos, UCW Conference and Presbyterial executives, to name some leaders. But many, many others have offered their gifts to the women of the United Church of Canada. Ordinary Heroes as Mardi Tindall referred to the UCW in the book by that name. Led by the Spirit? Yes. Celebrate Spirit with joy and thanksgiving

We remember all the work that has been done and is still being carried on by the members of the UCW, past and present. Throughout our history we have listened to the spirit's call and have responded offering our gifts in so many ways to the church. We have supported M&S beyond anything one would anticipate from our numbers. Led by the Spirit? Yes. Celebrate Spirit with joy and thanksgiving.

Today, women hold office in every area of the work of the United Church, here in Canada and in the wider world. With knowledge, wisdom, strength, love and gentleness, they practise their faith and lead the women of today in many ways; some tried and true, and carried on for our entire history, others new and creative, innovative and ground breaking, reaching out to a different community than we knew 55 years ago. Led by the Spirit? Yes. Celebrate Spirit with joy and thanksgiving

In this congregation (*name of your church*) the women of the UCW have fulfilled their mission in a variety of ways. Through our Christian scriptures we have come to know the man Jesus. As we read the stories about his life we learn how we should live as his followers. In celebration of our work, we will now present some symbols that represent our organization and our commitment to the commandment Jesus gave his followers- love God and love people.

We present a Bible to signify the place of scripture and the sacred story in all that we do.

A newspaper, The Observer and Mandate help us to learn about our world, and symbolize our commitment to justice, wholeness and peace in our world.

This is the symbol of our Mission and Service contribution to the whole outreach work of our church. (the logo of M&S) The total amount given in our 55 year history is almost \$1.5 billion dollars.

This picture of our church building will remind us of all that the women of the UCW have done and are doing to make this a safe, welcoming, nourishing, spirit filled place for all who come here to learn of God and to share in this loving community.

We bring forward a cup and saucer to signify hospitality. All are welcome to share our journey. And we offer refreshment at many church events. We are there to support families who are grieving, we celebrate birthdays and anniversaries with our presence, our love and good food. We bring a basket of treats and a cheery card, such as we might take to a shut-in or a person who is ill.

We bring a question mark with a cross superimposed on it. We do not know what lies ahead, but we go in faith, trusting that the spirit that has led us in the past will continue to lead us now and into the future.

Lastly we bring a flame, symbol of that spirit which we celebrate today.

These are our stories. This is our vision and our mission. This is our commitment to God and to the church. Together we work for the good of our church, community and world. Led by the spirit? Yes. Celebrate spirit with joy and thanksgiving.

HYMN Dance with the Spirit MV 156

PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE

God of time and eternity, your spirit has flown with us on all of our journeys. It has upheld us in times of trouble and sorrow. It has comforted, sustained and encouraged us when the road has been difficult or unsure. The spirit has rejoiced with us as we have laughed together in times of celebration and happiness. Ruah has blown into our lives calling us to risk and open ourselves to new ways of doing and being God's people. We have been led by the spirit in all

of our rich history and we celebrate with joy and thanksgiving. Thanks be to God, we are not alone.

(this prayer can be expanded to include any concerns or thanksgiving in the life of the congregation)

OFFERING

HYMN Come, O Holy Spirit, MV 23

BENEDICTION

May the spirit of life strengthen your body.

May the spirit of joy fill your heart .

May the spirit of wisdom enrich your mind.

May the spirit of love open your hands to serve.

Go forth and celebrate the spirit in all you do. Amen.

Children's Time

Talk to the children about how good it is to belong to something. They belong to their class at Sunday School.

When they go there they have friends, they sing together, listen to stories, talk about God and Jesus, have fun together. Sometimes they may have snacks or treats. They may even do something for others at times. All these things make us feel good, make us happy and glad to have friends and interesting things to do with them.

Well the UCW or United Church Women is just like that for the women of this church. Those same things are what they do. They read the Bible, and pray together, they sing hymns and tell the Bible stories. Sometimes they hear stories about people in other countries who need our help, and they find a way to help them. They have treats and coffee or tea together. They work hard doing lots of things around the church to help.

Just as you enjoy your Sunday School and make friends and learn many things, the women of the UCW also feel their group is very special to them.

And today they are celebrating an anniversary. The group is 55 years old this year. That's pretty old and the women are very happy and thankful to God for all the blessings they have shared.