



Dear Friends,

Following our practice these materials are offered for you to use or adapt for your worship on Conference Sunday, May 27.

In this time of transition in our United Church of Canada, the theme Changing Seasons reminds us that God is always with us. With change we will experience grief and struggle, new possibilities and joy. No matter where we find ourselves, we are not alone. Please pray for our Conference and Presbytery staff and leaders and for the interim Regional Council staff and leaders, ministry personnel, congregations and ministries.

Thanks to Rev. Debra McGill of St. Luke's United Church in Cambridge for the imaginative, thought provoking Dramatic Dialogue and to the other members of the Conference Worship Team – Gord Dunbar, Deborah Laforet, Paul Miller and Christabel Pinto for their input into this service and the worship at the 93rd Annual Meeting of Hamilton Conference. Thanks to Lianna Murdoch www.liannamation.com/ for drawing our theme logo. You are welcome to use it in your bulletins.

Blessings,

Rev. Heather Leffler
President of Hamilton Conference.

We Gather as Followers of Jesus

Ministry of Music

Acknowledgment of Traditional Territory

For thousands of years, First Nations people have walked on this land; their relationship with the land is at the centre of their lives and spirituality.

We begin our worship by acknowledging the traditional territory of the _____ *see below for your Presbytery* on which we gather today and the treaties that this land's settler ancestors made with First Nations.

And we are all Treaty people, parties to the Upper Canada, Haldimand, Huron, and Niagara Treaties.

Creator, as we come together, gathered on this land, keep us mindful of the covenants that have been made and broken with First Nations Peoples.

Be with us as we strive to make right with all our relations.

May we live with respect on this land and live in peace and friendship with all who live and work and worship on it.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

Let us gather and worship God of all times and places
who from the beginning gifted us with seasons and change
morning and evening, days and weeks, and sabbath time.

The One who is Holy Mystery and Wholly Love
gave us months, seasons and years ...

times for planting, growth, harvest and rest.

Gracious and Loving God, through the generations
your Spirit has called us to be your church in this place.

**In these changing seasons in our United Church,
help us continue to be the hands and feet of Christ
in this place as we move into this new season.**

We come to offer you gratitude and praise
as we worship together with the churches
of Hamilton Conference.

**We give thanks that throughout the changing seasons,
you are always with us. Amen**

Welcome/Announcements

Time of Silent Reflection

†Hymn: "O God, Whose First Creative Word"

VU #322

Prayer of Confession

Ever Faithful God, we confess that we often find it difficult to change. We hold on to the familiar and resist other ways of doing things. Forgive us and help us open our imagination to new ways of being your church in the world.

Gracious God, hear our silent prayers, as we confess those things that separate us from you and from each other...*(silence)*

Words of Assurance

Friends, hear the Good News. God, who has created and is creating, is doing new things in our church and our lives. Whatever we have thought or said or done to let God down or hurt another, we are forgiven, and we are loved.

Thanks be to God!

We Listen for God's Word

Special Music:

Scripture Lesson: Genesis 2:8-10a, 15 (*The Message*)

⁸⁻⁹Then God planted a garden in Eden, in the east. He put the Man he had just made in it. God made all kinds of trees grow from the ground, trees beautiful to look at and good to eat. The Tree-of-Life was in the middle of the garden, also the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil . . . A river flows out of Eden to water the garden . . . God took the Man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order.

Dramatic Dialogue: Act 1

Option 1 On the "stage" In the back ground a grouping of artificial trees. In front of the trees a "garden" of potted

flowers (real or artificial). Some butterflies, blue material to create a river. A screen or veil of tulle obstructing it so that the trees are vaguely visible.

Option 2 Have a screen you can project a garden on.

Option 3 If you use the craft, have people's pictures or flowers placed behind the tree in the final act.

Off to the side a watering can, wheel barrow, shovel, garden tools, a pot of tulips. Closer to the front of the "stage" area, person One digging in a pot of earth of a "dying" tree.

Music softly playing in the background.

Two hands free microphones.

One: I just don't understand! Why can't things just stay the same. No matter what I do, no matter how hard I try, I just can't save it, keep it the way it was. (*digging and adding some earth – mumbling*)

Two: (*Approaches from up the stairs.*) (*clears throat*) A hem! I'm coming up behind you and I didn't want to startle you. You sound upset. Is everything okay?

One: (*stands up*) I've been nursing this tree for a long time and it seems that no matter what I do, I can't make it healthy again, like the way it used to be. In fact, I'm afraid it might not survive. I'm doing everything exactly the same way I always have for . . . well . . . for years. I just don't understand why my tree isn't growing, isn't thriving anymore.

Two: Hmmmm, I understand your concern. That's a lot of time and energy you have invested. Do you know why it's not responding any more?

One: I really don't. But it's not even the time or energy I've put into it. I love this tree. I know that sounds weird or strange. But it's true. I've poured my heart and soul into this tree, nurtured it, fertilized it, invested in it. I feel as though I've let it down in some way.

Two: I'm wondering! And please don't be offended. But I'm wondering. Do you think perhaps it is time to care for your tree in a new and different way? You may not realize it, but it's needs have changed. Everything changes.

One: But it's the same tree, the same soil, the same fertilizer. The same pot! Nothing's changed. Everything is still the same!

Two: But something has changed! Just Imagine! Imagine for a moment if you did something different. If you gave it a fresh start. Trimmed it a little here. Unbound its roots a bit. Imagine the possibilities! No longer a tree in a pot, but a tree in a garden! A flowering tree. A tree with fruit. Maybe a tree in a forest!

One: I don't know. I've cared for it for so long in exactly the same way. And all this time, it has looked the very same.

Two: Until now. Now it's leaves are falling off and its branches are drooping.

One: I know. I just want it to look the way it used to. I'm not sure I can begin to imagine it looking any different. I have to admit, I'm afraid to do anything differently.

Two: Afraid! But it's roots will have more room, the soil will be fresh. Why are you afraid?

One: What if it dies?

†Hymn: "Wait for the Lord"

VU #22 repeat 4 to 6 times

Prayer

Grace, mercy and peace from God,
And the love of Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

Nothing has changed!

But we know that isn't true. So much has changed.

We gather as Hamilton Conference gathers for the last time, knowing that everything changes

and will never be the same ever again.

We grieve the loss of members of our church who have moved away or passed away.

And we celebrate the legacy they leave us, witnessing to their faith by sharing in our mission and ministry.

We grieve the changes in our churches,
The times we feel bruised and broken.

We grieve as we mark the final days of the body that is Hamilton Conference, and each of the Presbyteries who served it and the church well.

We celebrate and give thanks for the opportunities to serve God and for the friendships made along the way.

In the name of the Risen One,
We gather in this place,
Knowing that everything has changed.

**Released from our fears,
Healed from our wounds,
Challenged by God's love,**

We gather to celebrate the Divine presence that remakes us.

The transforming pain that reshapes us.

The Holy One's passionate energy that empowers us.

And who makes all things new again.

Amen.

And amen!

†Hymn: "In the Bulb There Is A Flower"

VU#703

Scripture Lesson: 2 Corinthians 9:6a, 8-11 (*The Message*)

Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything,

more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it, “He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon. His right-living, right-giving way never run out, never wear out.”

This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. God gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

Dramatic Dialogue: Act 2

Props: A wheel barrow with a bag of earth. Shovel leaning against it. Potted tulips/daffodils. The tree. Both “actors” are together.

One: I’ve been thinking about what you said. You know . . . about a fresh start. For my tree I mean.

Two: By the looks of it, you’re no longer just digging around the roots of your tree. What are you imagining?

One: Well I thought I would take the tree out of the pot and plant it in the ground, like you suggested. And maybe plant some flowers around it, different colours and kinds, maybe even another tree.

Two: Look out! God is on the loose and in the garden once again!

One: God?

Two: Yes! The One who imagined the unimaginable! Who made the sun and the moon and the stars. The One who burst the bonds of death is on the loose and in the garden again!

One: But all I did was unbind the roots of my tree. Plant some flowers.

Two: You set it free. Imagined other possibilities. Began to create something new.

One: It’s really quite exciting. I’ve been looking at catalogues and gardening books, thinking of making the garden even larger. Putting in some bushes and perhaps a fountain. A place for birds and butterflies.

Two: A resurrection garden!

One: God on the loose. Striding free and majestic as God has always done. Inviting us, summoning us, challenging us to imagine the unimaginable. To resurrect from the old something new again.

Prayer:

Holy One, you who are Holy Mystery and Wholly Love, you are the way of healing and hope, the one who makes all things new. Forgive us those times when we embraced our fears and failed to trust you, may this time of change and transition become for us a time of re-creation and transformation. We pray that we recognize your Holy Spirit as it moves through, among and in us, in our congregations, the regional councils and The United Church of Canada as a whole.

We pray for our Conference and Presbytery staff and leaders as they faithfully bring the work of Hamilton Conference; Bruce, Erie, Halton, Hamilton, Niagara and Waterloo Presbyteries to an end. We lift up the interim Regional Council Staff and leaders and pray that they will feel your Spirit guiding them in the decisions they make for this new way of being your church.

We are a people of the covenant and you, Creator and Holy One, are the one we covenant with. Through your great acts we are made part of the body of Christ. May we continue to strive to be holy and to live out our baptismal faith guided by your love and embraced by your redeeming grace.

We are your people, an Easter people, a people of the resurrection. The tomb was empty . . . in you Almighty One, all things are possible . . . for you make all things new. We lift up to you our deep thanks and gratitude in the name of the Resurrected Christ. Amen.

Conversation and/or Craft

Share conversation about when it has been hard for people to change or when they have experienced God's presence in a time of change. This could be done in small groups as people worked on the craft.

Have congregation make butterflies and flowers by folding paper or garden pictures by cutting and pasting pictures from magazines etc.

Lord's Prayer

VU #921/959

We Respond through the Holy Spirit

Offering Our Gifts

†Offering Song

VU #540

**Grant us, God, the grace of giving,
With a Spirit large and free,
that ourselves and all our living
we may offer faithfully.**

Words: Anonymous. Public Domain.

†Offering Prayer

Generous God, we give thanks that you have called us to be your church. We offer our gifts and ourselves to continue to share your love in our churches, communities and world. Amen.

Scripture: Revelation 21: 5 (The Message)

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Ezekiel 47:12 (The Message)

"The river itself, on both banks, will grow fruit trees of all kinds. Their leaves won't wither, the fruit won't fail. Every month they'll bear fresh fruit because the river from the Sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."

Revelation 22:1-4 (The Message)

¹⁻⁴ Then the Angel showed me Water-of-Life River, crystal bright. It flowed from the Throne of God and the Lamb, right down the middle of the street. The Tree of Life was planted on each side of the River, producing twelve kinds of fruit, a ripe fruit each month. The leaves of the Tree are for healing the nations. Never again will anything be cursed. The Throne of God and of the Lamb is at the center. His servants will offer God service—worshiping, they'll look on his face, their foreheads mirroring God. Never again will there be any night. No one will need lamplight or sunlight. The shining of God, the Master, is all the light anyone needs.

Dramatic Dialogue: Act 3

One: *(Pacing in front of the new garden, looking concerned!)*

Two: Hey! I haven't been by in a while. **Your** new garden looks great. You must feel really good now that it's finally finished.

One: Well, it's funny you should say that. Creating this little garden was really quite life-giving and after I planted the last of the flowers, I thought I was finished. But now I don't think I am finished. Not quite anyway.

Two: But it looks finished! At least as much as a garden can ever be finished! What happened?

One: Easter! Wouldn't you know it, Easter happened.

Two: Easter?

One: Yes. Jesus, standing in a garden, resurrected and unrecognizable. What looked like an ending was really a new beginning. A new and transformed life blossomed in the garden on that first Easter morning. And not just for Jesus, but for Mary as well.

Two: But I don't understand. What does that have to do with your tree or this garden?

One: God is on the loose . . . and in the garden once again . . . remember? And not only that, God is making all things new. Transforming endings into new beginnings. I was so afraid that it was an ending for my tree, but with imagination and your encouragement, my little lifeless tree was transformed into this garden. A new beginning. But now, I realize it doesn't end here.

Two: I suspect it doesn't end here, because it is actually the beginning of something else, right?

One: Ah, quite right. God is making all things new – taking what seemed lifeless and resurrecting it, transforming it.

Two: But I still don't understand. What are you thinking?

One: Not just thinking . . . imagining. I'm imagining a garden where others can come. Creating a place so vibrant and vital that everyone who comes to it will be renewed and refreshed . . . transformed in some way.

(one or two people separate the screens to reveal the "imagined" garden or a garden projected on the overhead screens or make a garden with peoples' flowers and pictures)

Two: A garden where life-giving waters flow and trees of every kind grow.

One: Yes! A garden that will "feed" those who are hungry and heal those who are hurting, the bruised and the broken ones.

Two: Sacred sanctuaries of life and light, of health and wholeness and healing.

One: Truly a resurrection garden! But even in my wildest imaginings, I know that creating it is beyond my abilities.

Two: But with God, all things are possible.

One: Yes, with God all things are possible . . . but God needs our help as well. And I need your help. I can't create this new garden alone.

Two: Well you're in luck. I've got my wheelbarrow and spade in the truck and my work gloves are here in my back pocket. And don't forget, I do belong to the United Horticultural Society so I know a lot of really imaginative, hard working and talented folk.

One: Oh my . . . did you feel that breeze? God is on the loose and in the garden once again.

Two: God's resurrection garden.

†Hymn: "We Shall Go Out with Hope of Resurrection" VU #586

†Sending Out and Blessing

As we leave this garden sanctuary,
May our God of the garden,
The One who created and continues to create,
Wash over your lives,
Filling you with hope, love and mercy.
As you walk the ways of Christ.
May you be encouraged, renewed and transformed.
Go out now into the world in peace that it might be so. Amen

†Choral Closing

VU #420 vs. 3

Bruce Presbytery:

- The unceded territory of the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation,
- the Saugeen Ojibwe, and more recently
- the Saugeen Metis

Erie Presbytery:

- The Haudenosaunee*,
- Anishnabe;
- The Neutral Nation (Attawandaron), and more recently,
- the Mississaugas of the New Credit

Halton Presbytery:

- The Anishnabe,
- Haudenosaunee,
- Huron-Wendat, and more recently,
- the Metis, and
- the Mississaugas of the New Credit.

Hamilton Presbytery:

- The Haudenosaunee, and
- Anishnabe

Niagara Presbytery:

- The Anishnabe,
- Ojibwe/Chippewa,
- Haudenosaunee, and
- the Neutral Nation (Attawandaron)

Waterloo Presbytery:

- Anishnabe,
- Haudenosaunee,
- The Neutral Nation (Attawandaron), and more recently,
- the Mississaugas of the New Credit

**Haudenosaunee (people of the longhouse) = Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations*