



Notes on a Christian Service of Worship Celebrating Christian-Jewish Relations

| The United Church of Canada

The following notes are provided to: * Assist worship leaders, musicians, committees and groups in the planning of this service of worship; * Offer opportunities for local adaptation, further creativity and additional worship; * Provide information which may be shared with the congregation in study, reflection or worship

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Celebrating Christian-Jewish Relations

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- Assist worship leaders, musicians, committees and groups in the planning of this service of worship;
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Gathering

Preparation

The gathering and preparation of the people can be supported by texts for prayer, meditation and centering. The contemporary Jewish prayer provided offers a poignant and moving source of common ground among Christians and Jews as the service begins (*Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*, p. 187). It could be included in the bulletin or projected on a screen (where the latter is used for other elements of worship).

Other more familiar and appropriate sources for such preparation can be found at VU* 525 and 656.

If announcements are gathered at the beginning of the service, a time for silent preparation can be invited at the conclusion of the announcements.

Call to Worship

These verses from Deuteronomy 6, called the "Shema" (literally, "Hear"), are central in Jewish worship, from ancient times to this day, where they function similarly as a call to worship and remembrance of God's Sinai covenant. Jesus acknowledges their centrality in the so-called "Great Commandment" (Mt. 22:37-40; Mk. 12:12-31; Lk. 10:25-28).

They are rendered here as a responsive Call to Worship, but could also be given in one voice, from the front or back of the church.

Hymn

The hymns in this service were chosen from *Voices United* (the Hymnal of the United Church of Canada) though several, together with the other suggestions which follow, can be found in other hymn books.

VU 255 "The Living God Be Praised". This Jewish hymn is a metrical adaptation of the *Yigdal*, a Jewish doxology. The text has its sources in 12th century Judaism; the tune is named after the Jewish cantor at the Great Synagogue in London, England, Meyer Lyon, who transcribed it in the late 1700s.

Other suggestions: VU 245 "Praise the Lord with the Sound of Trumpet" is a contemporary, upbeat, psalm-like hymn, particularly suitable for all ages; VU 240 "Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven," while familiar, may not always be appreciated as a paraphrase of Psalm 103.

Many other hymns conducive to a consciousness of Jewish-Christian relations in worship can also be found in hymn books under "Praise and Thanksgiving", "Nature of God", "Creation and Providence", "The Church in the World" and, of course, the "Psalms and Scripture Songs". Look particularly for psalm-like praise hymns and biblical imagery from the Old Testament.

Opening Prayer

This prayer can be offered in one voice or rendered responsively, with the indented lines to be said by the people.

An Act of Confession

The structure includes a sung response, the well-known Jewish assurance of forgiveness and an up-beat "Hallelujah." The words to the sung portions are best printed in the bulletin so as to allow for ease of flow from singing to reading and back again.

The unison prayer of confession picks up on key components of the United Church of Canada "[Proposed Statement](#)," e.g. note the use of **acknowledge, reject, affirm, encourage**.

Children's Time

"*Dayeinu!* Enough!" Where a separate time with children is the custom, the "Refrain" of VU 131 can serve as a playful and instructive focus to a Jewish-style act of thanksgiving.

Background: This Israeli folksong is often sung at the beginning or end of a seder passover meal. It is one way in which Jewish people sing about all the good things God has done for them.

Process: Teach the Refrain -- *Dayeinu!* (Enough!) -- pronounced *Die-yea-noo*. Share some things for which you are thankful; declare that "If God had simply done/given this, that would be **enough!** But God does even more for us!" Then sing the Refrain *Dayeinu!* (Enough!). Invite more thanksgivings from children and those of all ages; after each, declare "If God had simply given us/you this, that would be **enough!** Sing the Refrain each time, or after every few contributions.

Percussion, tambourines and clapping are to be encouraged!

[Word](#)

The Word section of the liturgy begins with a spoken responsive call to listen.

This whole section is linked by singing in response to each reading, using new words to the melody of the Hasidic folk song at VU 167. People will catch on to the tune easily, especially if initiated and led each time by a choir or song leaders. The words will need to be printed in the bulletin or projected.

Note that the spoken and sung response to each reading varies as appropriate.

An **alternative approach** would be to sing another Hasidic folk song, VU 272 "Open Your Ears, O Faithful People" -- the first verse before the first reading, the second after the Gospel reading.

First Reading

This service avoids the use of the term "Hebrew Scripture" for the first reading. However well-intentioned, "Hebrew Scripture" is neither accurate nor helpful. First, Christians do not read it in Hebrew; second, our "Old Testament" is not identical to the Jewish scriptures. From this perspective even "Old Testament" is preferable for the purposes of Christian worship. However, "First Reading" is used here so as to avoid any implication of supersessionism implied in the adjective "Old."

The words from Micah appear in nearly identical form in Isaiah 2:1-5. The text provides an opportunity to affirm that Christians in general, and United Church communities in particular, root our prophetic and justice-seeking vision in the ethos of the Jewish prophets.

Psalm

Psalm 133 is a short and simple psalm, rich in Jewish symbolism.

VU 856 could provide for a spirited version from another culture as a hymn or anthem.

Nearly any Psalm of praise could be used in this service as the Psalm. Psalms of confession or lament could also serve the spirit of this service well, depending perhaps upon the content of the sermon.

Second Reading

This text from Romans 15 is a provocative call to "build up the neighbour" and "live in harmony with one another" (v. 1-6), all within a vision of Christ as "servant" of the Jewish people, whose life and work "confirms" the "promises given to the patriarchs."

Third Reading

This story also appears in Mt. 15:21-28; this version makes explicit that the woman is a Gentile.

The woman's inclusive perspective challenges Jesus, and prompts him to recognize and affirm her vision.

Sermon

Jesus was a Jew! Unpack the significance of this – personally, spiritually, theologically, liturgically, ethically, prophetically.

Use the above notes on the readings, this service as a whole, and "[Bearing Faithful Witness](#)" as resources to proclaim God's Word in Christ as deeply rooted in Jewish spirituality.

Our Christian identity and self-understanding – from the prophetic tradition to our liturgical traditions – is rooted in the Jewish faith.

Contrast "proselytism" with "bearing faithful witness" (e.g. as seen in such stories as the Syrophenician Woman, the Good Samaritan, etc.).

An Affirmation of Faith: "God is Faithful"

The content of this affirmation is drawn from the United Church [statement](#).

[Thanksgiving](#)

The Peace

Jesus' words call to mind the manner in which gestures of peace bear faithful witness.

Offering

A special offering for this service might be considered in support of local Jewish community groups or projects of common cause.

Dedication Hymn

VU 679 "O For a World" is a prayer for "one world family" in "God's glorious reign of peace."

Other suggestions: VU 600 "When I Needed a Neighbour" includes a thought-provoking chorus where Jesus asks "And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?"; VU 679 "Let There Be Light" is a similarly powerful prayer, making God's words in Genesis our prayer today; a Doxology would also be appropriate.

Dedication Prayer

A prayer for "Gifts and Blessings" from a Jewish Shabbat service (*Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*, p. 155), with "Word" replacing "Torah."

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Concern

"Shoah" as the "preferred Jewish term for the mass murder of European Jews" (see the proposed [United Church Statement](#)).

Original and extemporaneous prayers in the style of Prayers of the People (intercessions) are also appropriate, especially those crafted by members of the congregation in response to study and reflection on the United Church statement and local experience.

[Going Forth](#)

Hymn

VU 634 "To Abraham and Sarah" is a Canadian United Church hymn which functions in this service to point to our common parentage, calling and journey with Jews.

Other suggestions: VU 578 "As a Fire Is Meant for Burning" calls us to "build a "bridge of care," "beyond our creeds and customs"; VU 678 "For the Healing of the Nations" is a familiar prayer for global healing, and rejection of "pride of status, race or schooling."

Blessing and Sending Forth

United Church inclusivity and inter-faith theology is gathered up in a blessing of its former Moderator Lois Wilson.

The Sending Forth uses words from Deuteronomy 31, familiar also to Jewish worship.

For Going Forth

701 "What Does the Lord Require of You" picks up on the prophet Micah again, this time from Micah 6:6-8.

Linnea Good's version at VU 298, "When You Walk from Here", would also perform the same function.

Either are most effective if learned over a period of time, perhaps with leadership from the choir or song leaders, and used or repeated often (perhaps in anticipation of this service).

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Notes on a Christian Service of Worship Celebrating Christian-Jewish Relations

- The liturgy was prepared by William S. Kervin at the request of and in consultation with the *Bearing Faithful Witness* national steering group of The United Church of Canada.
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* **VU = Voices United**, the new worship and hymn book of the United Church of Canada

[Service of Worship](#)