

CHINOOK WINDS REGION

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

Covenant People & Treaty People

A Liturgy of *Covenant* in this time leading up to the Alberta Referendum

Prelude / Musical Reflection Suggestions

As people gather, one of these (or another) song might be playing. If you don't have musical support, one might find a video or recording of one of these songs to have playing as folks are gathering for worship.

If this is done as a musical reflection (live or prerecorded), including the words in a leaflet might be helpful.

- **Covenant Hymn (Wherever You Go I Will Follow)** – based on the covenantal words from Ruth 1:16, this song emphasizes a commitment for people with diverse backgrounds to journey together. You can find the words [here](#). This could make a nice gathering song if you have a piano or guitar player and singer and is covered under OneLicense. There is a recording of the song, [here](#), the hymnary entry is [here](#), and (for subscribers) you can find .pdf versions of it on OneLicense website.

OneLicense 88757 - Tune: Gary Daigle, © 1993, GIA Publications, Inc. Text: Rory Cooney, © 1993, GIA Publications, Inc.

- **We Are One as We Come (VU402)** – this hymn emphasizes unity and keeping together in God's love in difficult times – with verse 1 focusing on praise, and verse 2 on healing and hope amidst 'brokenness and fear'. In addition to the VU version, you can find lyrics and other resources for this song [here](#).

Welcome

The person welcoming may use all or some of these words or craft their own.

On October 19, the people of Alberta will head to the polls to answer 10 questions.

As we gather today, we do NOT gather to tell you how to vote. We DO gather to prayerfully and humbly seek to ensure that the values and practices of our Christian faith will inform *how* we will vote.

We also gather to covenant toward action - and to raise up the voices of those who might not be heard.

In this liturgy, we are, together, invited to prayerfully consider what it means to be a people of 'covenant'; that is, those who seek to live in right relationship with God, with each other and within God's creation.

Our starting point is that the earth (and all its fullness) belongs to God, the Creator and Source of all – and does not belong to any one nation, church, government, culture or people.

We continue in the Hebrew and Christian understandings that God enters into sacred and binding agreements (covenants) with God's people – and that, though eternal, these agreements must be renewed and interpreted with each generation.

Knowing that covenant is foundational to our faith and way of relating to God, the land and each other, we consider more recent ‘covenants’ – such as treaties.

Treaties – nation-to-nation agreements between Indigenous nations and the Crown (federal, provincial and territorial government), which define ongoing rights, land use, and shared responsibilities, laid the foundations of our country and our provinces.

While treaties have been marred by colonialism and white supremacy, they were understood by Indigenous peoples as the foundation by which we would be in good relationship – co-stewards, with shared destinies, responsibilities, and commitments as nation-to-nation partners.

As part of our worship, we ask ourselves; what our sacred agreements, ancient and more recent (such as treaties), might call us into.

At a time of polarization and at a time where there are many populist movements which seek to divide, we seek to re-root ourselves in an ancient understanding of God, the earth and how to relate to diverse and even opposed people as covenantal and treaty people. Therefore, come, let us worship.

Land Acknowledgement

For the land acknowledgment for this worship, you are invited to prepare a meaningful, personalized acknowledgement.

In recent years, Indigenous peoples and communities have critiqued how land acknowledgements are often done.

As you prepare the acknowledgement for this worship, you are encouraged to hear the words of Chelsea Vowel who is Métis from manitow-sâkahikan (Lac Ste. Anne) Alberta, residing in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton): “The way in which territorial acknowledgments are delivered must matter. Are they formulaic recitations that barely penetrate the consciousness of the speaker and those listening? Are they something that must be ‘gotten through’ before the meeting or speech can begin?” – see Chelsea’s whole reflection [here](#). There is also an article from CBC here, offering more advice [here](#).

In addition to the above, some questions you might consider as you write a land acknowledgement:

- What might it mean to humbly name the complicity of the Church, including The United Church of Canada in historical and ongoing projects of colonialism?
- What Indigenous Nations and peoples are still present in your context and/or in your own faith community - and how are they named as being present, rather than in the past tense?
- Are you speaking of ‘we’ as settlers when there are Indigenous members of your Community of Faith?
- What engagements (good or bad) has your community of faith had with Indigenous communities, organizations and peoples? Might these be named – not to virtue signal, but as expressions of solidarity?
- What concrete actions and commitments to de-colonize and seek justice, right relationship, conciliation and reconciliation that your Community of Faith is engaging in might be named? Again, this is not to virtue signal, but to name commitments that are still in progress.
- In addition to people, how is the land itself being named and honoured in the acknowledgement?
- How do your stated commitments flow from our denominational call to a faith of *deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice*?

See an example (and more thoughts about) of a personalized Land Acknowledgement, [here](#).

Lighting the Christ Candle

Let us pray: O Great Spirit, Creator of all light and life, as we gather in this sacred space, we now light the Christ candle as a symbol of your divine presence among us and a reminder that we are covenant people. We remember the words of Christ, the Light of the World, who calls us to be beacons of hope, healing, and reconciliation. Adapted from Shane Goldie [2023 Indigenous Day of Prayer Service](#).

Opening Congregational Hymn / Song Suggestions

One or more of the following hymns which have themes of covenant and God's enduring presence could be sung.

VU288 - **Great Is Thy Faithfulness**

VU232 – **Joyful, Joyful We Adore You**

VU 296 - **This Is God's Wondrous World**

VU 399 - **God Whose Love Is Reigning O'er Us**

VU402 - **We Are One As We Come**

MV146 - **The Kingdom of God** (Taizé Community)

MV85 - **Take O Take Me As I Am**

A Call To Worship / Opening Words

This or another call to worship can be read responsively

The earth is God's

All of it – the fullness thereof!

We belong to God

We are God's covenant people

All of us – whatever our tongue, group, or nation

We belong to God.

All covenants with God

Are for the good of all people of the earth.

God has been faithful

And we seek to respond in faithfulness

God is love

And so we seek to respond in love

For this faithfulness and love

We praise you, O God our Creator and Redeemer. *Rob Shearer*

Scripture

One or more of the following scriptures can be read.

Hebrew Scripture: Genesis 28:10-22 (NRSVUE translation) – God's covenant with Jacob for the good of all the peoples of the earth

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a stairway set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring, and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know

that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So, Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you.”

Canticle – *may be read responsively*

A Canticle based on Isaiah 42: 5-8a

Thus says God, the Creator of the heavens,
who fashioned the earth and all that dwells in it;

Who gives breath to the people upon it

and spirit to those who walk in it,

‘I am the Lord and I have called you in right living and right relationship,

I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

‘I have given you as a covenant to the people,

a light to the nations, to open the eyes that will not see,

‘To bring out the captives from the dungeon,

from the prison, those who sit in darkness.

‘I am the Lord, that is my name;

my glory I give to no other.’ *adapted from the Church of England*

Christian Scripture: Luke 4: 16-21 (NRSVUE)

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because [the Lord] has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
[And] has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And [Jesus] rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Sermon or Dialogue Sermon

For a response to the scriptures, there are several options – a preacher might prepare a sermon based on the scripture, drawing on some of the themes below weaving together notions of covenant and the implications for our Communities of Faith as covenantal and treaty people.

Alternately, a ‘dialogical’ sermon could happen where the ideas are framed by a leader and the whole gathered people of God reflect passages together. You can watch a video giving a short ‘framework’ about how to set up a dialogue or conversational sermon from Dan White Jr. [here](#).

Some Theological Starting Points for a Sermon or Conversation on Covenant

- The notion of *covenant* is deeply rooted in Hebrew and Christian theologies. Simply put, a Biblical covenant is “a sacred, binding agreement between two parties” – and, in the case of the Hebrew and Christian Bible, this is often between God and humanity or, sometimes between two people - such as David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi.
- One approach to scripture is that the Bible is the sacred Story of God yearning after God’s people who are struggling and often failing to live into their side of the covenants. In this read, it’s a very human thing to struggle to be faithful to our side of the deal. Many folks who are married (a form of covenant) might affirm this struggle!
- In covenants in the Hebrew Scriptures (the so-called Old Testament), it is clear that most, if not all of these covenants are not merely for the good of one ethnic group, but for all peoples – see, as examples, Genesis 12:3 - the Abrahamic Covenant – “In you ALL the families of the earth shall be blessed” (*emphasis added*) and Genesis 22:18 - “by your offspring ALL the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves.” This is once again repeated in God’s covenant with Jacob in Genesis 28:14 that “All people of the earth will be blessed”. This is extremely important to underline – especially given the current genocide in Gaza – as sometimes these texts are used to justify the rightful ownership of land of one group over another, without any reference to their main purpose; which is the flourishing of all.
- When Jesus begins his public ministry, he unrolls the scroll reading the words of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah. We, as Jesus-people, understand the fulfilment of the covenants to be in the Reign (or Kingdom) of God, of God’s shalom – and this is rooted in the understanding of Jubilee – where all debts are forgiven and where land is returned to its original occupants (see Leviticus 25:8–12, Leviticus 25:10, Leviticus 25:13–17 and Isaiah 61:1–2 or this backgrounder on the Biblical Jubilee from Kairos, [here](#)).
- Like earlier covenants, Jesus’ covenant seeks to be for the good of ALL in setting the captives free. The Christian covenant shows continuity in that it is for the good of ALL people; Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” and Romans 10:12: “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call.”
- The Cayuga First Nation member of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy of the Grand River Territory, Ont. And theologian Adrian Jacobs speaks of Churches making covenants with Indigenous Communities. How might this understanding of covenant relate to the situation in Alberta at this time? For more on Jacobs’ covenant understanding and a concrete practice with a congregation - see [here](#) (link from Mennonite Central Committee). For more on what it means to be a treaty people, see [here](#).
- In Alberta, treaties were signed on paper. In contrast to this, some communities in what is now Eastern Canada, including the Haudenosaunee and Mi’kmaq used Wampum Belts as sacred agreements as [this CBC article](#) explains. One of the earliest belts was [between the Vatican and the Mi’kmaq in 1610](#). The belts give a visual representation of the sacredness and enduring intention of these ‘covenants’ in a way that might be harder to convey in paper treaties.
- In his work on Covenant, Walter Brueggemann notes: “The God of covenant is a God of hospitality who welcomes into the community and into the political economy those who are inconvenient. This is the God who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. (Deut 10:18) Imagine God making provision for food and clothing for those outside “the tribe”! That provision, moreover, is said to be an “execution of justice,” so that the needs of orphan, widow, and immigrant are not charity but a just right.”
- From Walter Brueggemann, *Tenacious Solidarity: Biblical Provocations on Race, Religion, Climate, and the Economy*.

Prayer

This written prayer or other forms of prayer can be offered.

If you wanted something less ‘word’ based and more ‘tactile’ you might consider prayer stations where music is played and folks light a candle or use a [prayer loom](#).

Let us pray:

God of Covenant Love, we pray for this upcoming Referendum,
that your will be done here in Alberta, as it is in heaven.

Make us instruments of your peace, joy and justice

God, we pray for communities whose voices might struggle to be heard in these days –
we name Indigenous Nations, peoples and organizations, we name migrant, newcomer and refugee
communities.

(space may be offered for other groups to be named here... together we say...)

Guide us, O great God of Covenant,

guide our footsteps to come alongside those most affected by the outcomes of this Referendum.

We know that we are a divided people.

Grant us a unity which is not a uniformity, but that leads to flourishing for all your people and all your creation.

**Remind us that we are a covenant people, and to hold ancient and newer covenants with you,
and with others with the sacredness they deserve.**

Call us into right relationship, deep listening, care and compassion
in times that often seem mean, harsh, divisive and polarized.

Make us witnesses of your jubilee, practitioners of your love.

Make our communities signs and symbols for your Reign.

(as appropriate, the community might be invited to speak their own prayers in a period of silence)

We offer these prayers – the prayers we have spoken [woven, candles we have lit] to the great God of Covenant,
by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus. **Amen.** Rob Shearer

Confession

The gathered community may wish to engage in an act of confession, read responsively.

God, we confess that we have not always loved you.

We have not loved our neighbours in the way you have called us to.

We have made and broken promises to you, to each other and to others nearby.

We have heard your ancient call to love, to hospitality, to jubilee, to justice, to mercy

We have wrestled with you.

Forgive us for the times through our actions or inactions we created the conditions which have harmed others

We have not honoured our covenants with you, and with our kinfolk

Restore righteousness, right living, right relationship in this land, to all peoples

That everyone might live in peace and without fear.

*A brief silence is held to name the ways that we, individually or collectively have ‘missed the mark’ (sinned) – if
you would like a musical interlude, either TLUS 102 - **Nothing to Fear** or MV79 - **Spirit Open My Heart** could be
appropriate. Also, many years ago, the late Rev. John Snow, Jr. - Treaty 7 and Stoney Nakoda - spoke of how
VU408 - **Just As I Am** had a special and sacred meaning for his people. In respect of this, perhaps a verse of this
hymn (penned by a woman living with chronic pain) could serve as a musical interlude.*

The Assurance of God’s Grace

The leader says these- or other words, as they see fit

The good news of God's covenants over the ages - is that, indeed, they are good news for ALL peoples. This includes you, each of us, our neighbours, our perceived enemies, every single person – and, indeed all of God's reconciling creation, which God loves and for which Jesus came to redeem and liberate. In Jesus' we are renewed and freed from every guilt. There is nothing that can separate us from God's love, made known to us in Christ Jesus. We are aware that, though our hearts wander, your grace binds us to you O great Creator! Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

The Peace

The peace of the reconciling Christ be with you!

And also with you.

Possible Musical Responses to God's Grace and Peace

If the community wishes to respond in song, here are some suggestions:

VU559 - **Come O Fount Of Every Blessing**. This hymn reflects some of the theology and language in the assurance, and also speaks of the new creation perfectly restored in God.

VU266 - **Amazing Grace** - There are verses in 4 indigenous languages in VU if you have any speakers / singers in your community or community partnerships.

TLUS109 - **Beautiful Things** – This contemporary song speaks of how God makes beauty out of broken things.

Response / Making A Covenant for Action

Some or all of the following actions could be offered as a way for the community to respond collectively and/or individually. Some of the links could be printed in a leaflet or put on a screen. There could be a challenge to create a covenant together, going forward, so that, in the weeks to come, some of the values we hold can be reflected in our actions.

- Without being partisan, one might seek from the gathered community a commitment to show up on October 19. Educate the community about the referendum – where to vote, and the format of the Questions 1-9 about immigration and access to services, and Question 10 about whether Alberta should remain part of Canada. Questions are available on the Elections Alberta website [here](#).
- [kNow the 9](#) gives one perspective on how to vote. Review their approach and see if you agree with it. Does it match the values of your / our Christian faith?
- How can the Community of Faith offer practical support for people to vote? This could include carpooling, childcare, being sure folks have proper ID, knowing that folks know where to vote in your community.
- Seek to listen and amplify the voices of indigenous communities around the referendum – read about how Indigenous communities seek to “Rock the Vote” [here](#).
- Since we are praying through covenant in this liturgy, what would it mean to covenant as a community to support each other in engaging the Referendum as well as supporting each other to vote? A simple covenant might have commitments to God and each other to pray, educate and help those get to vote who might not have the means (again, such as transportation, childcare, knowledge of how to register, and understanding of the questions).

Sending

The leader can share these or other words as folks are sent.

As we are sent, we are reminded that we are covenant people – that we are people of ancient and more recent sacred covenants of trust. We go, assured that God is with us, whatever the outcomes may be in the days to come. We go called to come alongside communities who are in fear of what might happen in the days and weeks to come. We, siblings, go with the Story of Christ Jesus, the power of the Spirit and the Source of All sacred covenant into the world They created. We go now in love. **Amen.**

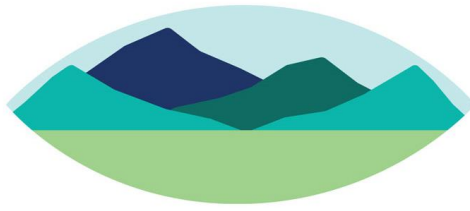
Possible Closing Hymns

One of these hymns or another can be sung.

Your Peace Will Make Us One (not in hymnals). This re-write of the Battle Hymn of the Republic was originally penned by suffragette pacifist Julia Ward Howe in 1861. [Here is a recording](#) from Wall Street United Church in Brockville ON. You can find lyrics and video for Audrey's version [here](#). CCLI License or permission required for use.

TLUS 123 - **Lift Every Voice and Sing**. This is also known as the "Black National Anthem" and speaks of God's presence through the collective toils and tribulations of life.

MV216 - **Wherever You Go**. This United Church Hymn expresses a desire to journey together whatever the circumstances.



CHINOOK WINDS REGION

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

All Are Made in God's Image & No One Is Illegal

A Liturgy of Hospitality, Migration and Personhood in this time leading up to the Alberta Referendum

Prelude / Musical Reflection Suggestions

As people gather, one of these songs might be playing.

If you don't have musical support, one might find a video or recording of one of these songs to play as folks gather for worship. If this is done as a musical reflection (live or prerecorded), including the words in a leaflet might be helpful.

In 2017, The Hymn Society put out a free, downloadable songbook called [Singing Welcome](#) - a collection of songs of hospitality to refugees and immigrants – many with familiar tunes.

There are a number of hymns in here for congregational or reflection that would work well for this service of worship.

Here are two possible prelude / reflection songs:

- **All You Refugees** – music found in page 10-11 of *Singing Welcome* is a lovely song of welcome to refugees – [here is a video](#) Sandra McCracken's version.
- **Refugee King** by Liz Vice – [version here](#) – especially lovely as we arc toward Advent Season.

Welcome

The person welcoming may use these words or craft their own.

On October 19, the people of Alberta will head to the polls to answer 10 questions.

As we gather today, we do NOT gather to tell you how to vote. We DO gather to prayerfully and humbly seek to ensure that the values and practices of our Christian faith will inform *how* we will vote.

We also gather to covenant toward action - and to raise up the voices of those who might not be heard.

Our starting point, today, is ALL people are made in God's image, and that, in spite of any good that borders and boundaries might have, in God's heart, and in the heart of the Beloved Community of Christ's Church, all are welcome. There are no categories of 'illegal' or 'legal' in Jesus' heart - and that there is a sacred responsibility to welcome the 'stranger' as if they are Christ Jesus himself (see Matthew 25: 35-39).

In this liturgy, we are, together, invited to prayerfully consider what Christian hospitality and a Christian understanding of the Divine image being in every single person means.

Part of the call is to regard all humans as our siblings and thus cry out and offer solidarity when any are suffering. It also calls us to actively oppose the dehumanization or stereotyping of individuals and communities. Finally, it is a call to resist all forms of white supremacy – be it intentional or not – and whether it is ‘in-your-face’ or appears more ‘polite’.

At a time of polarization and at a time where there are many populist and conspiratorial movements which seek to divide, we seek to re-root ourselves in an ancient understanding of that all are made in God’s image, that Jesus, our redeemer and his holy family were themselves displaced migrants and refugees and that we, as Jesus’ followers, that when we do to those who are most in need, we do to God in Christ Jesus. Come, let us worship.

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- Are you speaking of ‘we’ as settlers when there are Indigenous members of your Community of Faith?
- What engagements (good or bad) has your community of faith had with Indigenous communities, organizations and peoples? Might these be named – not to virtue signal, but as expressions of solidarity?
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- In addition to people, how is the land itself being named and honoured in the acknowledgement?
- How does your stated commitments flow from our denominational call to a faith of *deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice*?

See an example (and more thoughts about) of a personalized Land Acknowledgement, [here](#).

Lighting the Christ Candle

Let us pray: O Great Spirit, Creator of all light and life, as we gather in this sacred space, we now light the Christ candle as a symbol of your divine presence among us and a reminder that we are covenant people. We remember the words of Christ, the Light of the World, who calls us to be beacons of hope, healing, and reconciliation. Adapted from Shane Goldie [2023 Indigenous Day of Prayer Service](#).

Call To Worship

These or other words might be offered.

God of justice and compassion, we give thanks for your presence among us here and now. We are grateful beyond words that you always find us, meet us where we are, and guide us into experiences of healing love and homecoming. We praise you and give thanks for the Extravagant Welcome that runs through the entire biblical Story. **Thank you, God, for your Welcoming Love.**

Today we connect our worship specifically with both the heartbreaking realities and the rich gifts of immigrants and refugees who long to cross borders and who live in this place.

Thank you, God, for your Welcoming Love.

We are reminded O God that our spiritual ancestors in Scripture were themselves often refugees, sojourners, and “strangers.” We remember their desperate hunger and thirst in the desert. We remember your constant presence, guidance, and provision, as well as the countless exhortations in scripture to practice hospitality, welcome the stranger, do justice, and reach out to those most destitute and vulnerable.

Thank you, God, for your Welcoming Love.

Holy One, as we worship you now, we ask that you open our hearts, deepen our compassion, and broaden our practices of hospitality. We pray for guidance as we seek to be communities of support, grace, and justice. Teach us how to be in Christ-centred solidarity with all those seeking asylum, fleeing for their lives, and longing for a new start from wherever they might come on this tumultuous yet beautiful planet.

Thank you, God, for your Welcoming Love. This prayer is adapted from Bryan Sirchio, pastor of McFarland UCC in McFarland, WI – from the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ – originally available [here](#).

Opening Hymn Suggestions

TLUS 28 - **I’m Gonna Eat At The Welcome Table** – an African American spiritual which “was composed by an anonymous author, almost certainly an enslaved person... it was sung by an enslaved child who was being forcefully separated from his mother.” (Wikipedia)

MV62 - **There Is Room for All**

God, You Move Across the Borders – this Carolyn Winfrey Gillette song is not in hymnals but is very appropriate and can be sung to the tune of Nettleton (aka “Come, O Fount of Every Blessing” or else Beach Spring). Words and permissions to use the hymn can be found [here](#).

Scripture(s)

Rather than reading one a chunk of one scripture or more, you might consider reading a number of these short scripture passages which give an overview of the call to hospitality, care and compassion (especially to the migrant) across scripture. One approach could be cut these out onto pieces of paper, hand them out as people arrive - and have multiple voices in the congregation read them aloud from their seats/pews.

‘I am a stranger and an alien residing among you; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight.’ - Genesis 23:4

“You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” - Exodus 23:9 (ESV)

You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. - Deuteronomy 10:19

"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do [them] wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love [them] as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." - Leviticus 19:33-34 (ESV)

'Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.' Then all the people shall say, 'Amen!' - Deuteronomy 27:19 (NIV).

When they were few in number, of little account, and strangers in the land, wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people, he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account, saying, 'Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.' - 1 Chronicles 16:19-22

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. - Psalm 146:9

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever. - Jeremiah 7:5-7

You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. - Ezekiel 47:22

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. - Zechariah 7:9-10

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. - Matthew 25:35

Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my [siblings] you did it to me. - Matthew 25:40

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself. - Luke 10:27

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. - Romans 12:13

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. - Romans 13:8

Love does no wrong to a neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. - Romans 13:10

In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all. - Colossians 3:11

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. - Hebrews 13:1-3

*These are adapted from <https://sojo.net/22-bible-verses-welcoming-immigrants>.
All scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition unless otherwise noted.*

Sermon or Dialogue Sermon

For a response to the scriptures, there are several options – a preacher might prepare a sermon based on the scripture, drawing on some of the themes below weaving together notions of welcome, compassion, hospitality and being made in the image of God (the ‘imago Dei’). You might wish to reflect on some of the concepts and questions offered below.

Alternately, a ‘dialogical’ sermon could happen where the ideas are framed by a leader and the whole gathered people of God reflect passages together. You can watch a video giving a short ‘framework’ about how to set up a dialogue or conversational sermon from Dan White Jr. [here](#).

Some Theological Starting Points on Migration and Personhood

- The scriptures in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures (the so-called Old and New Testaments) offer a call to care for and offer hospitality to the orphan, widow, ‘alien’, sojourner and stranger. How might these scriptures inform how we, as Christians, would vote all questions on the Referendum and the first 9, in particular.
- Central to the Hebrew and Christian understandings of personhood is the notion of what, in Latin, is called the “Imago Dei” that is – that we are all created in God’s image. This notion has been central to the formation of the more modern idea of human rights. How does this understanding - that every person is made in God’s image - inform how we might approach the referendum?
- For Christians, Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25 of whatsoever one does to the ‘least’ (most in need) of my siblings, you do it to me – deepens this notion of the Imago Dei. Not only is God found in each person, but how we respond to any person in need is how we are treating / responding to God! How does this frame how we might treat newcomers, migrants and refugees?
- The concept of hospitality – offering a space in your home (usually at personal expense and even some risk) for someone, in need – and often a stranger - is another key theme in Christian scriptures. What are the implications for to being or becoming a community of hospitality on all levels; national, provincial, local and, yes, as a faith community (whether you have a building or not)?
- How might your community be or become a place of deep and radical hospitality – not just to people like us but the ‘other’; the stranger, etc.? What does this mean around some of the rhetoric that is being engaged by some in this Referendum?
- Walter Brueggemann notes: “The God of covenant is a God of hospitality who welcomes into the community and into the political economy those who are inconvenient. This is the God who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. (Deut 10:18) Imagine God making provision for food and clothing for those outside “the tribe”! That provision, moreover, is said to be an “execution of justice,” so that the needs of orphan, widow, and immigrant are not charity but a just right.”
- From Walter Brueggemann, *Tenacious Solidarity: Biblical Provocations on Race, Religion, Climate, and the Economy*.

Prayer

One of these written prayers or other forms of prayer can be offered.

If you wanted something less ‘word’ based and more ‘tactile’ you might consider prayer stations where music is played and folks light a candle or use a [prayer loom](#).

Option 1: A Prayer for Refugees

The litany may begin with the reading, chanting, or singing of Psalm 64.

Hear us, Lord, as we raise our voices;
in you we take refuge.

Preserve those whose life is threatened by enemies
and who are the target of bitter words or evil schemes.

Remember those who are vulnerable and exposed,
those who are victims of natural disaster, war, and persecution,
those suffering anguish and sorrow.

Bring them to safety;
in you we take refuge.

Give shelter to those seeking a hiding place, to those torn from their homes,
those who are separated from loved ones, those who are lost or have run away.

Bring them to safety;
in you we take refuge.

You look with mercy and love on all refugees.
Help us to welcome the stranger, befriend the lonely, and show compassion.

Allow your Spirit to move in us and teach us to seek justice,
To love mercy, and to walk humbly with you, telling of all your works.

Let us rejoice and give praise;

in you we take refuge. adapted from Melissa Haupt, 2011, © Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike. Taken from Kairos resource, [here](#).

Option 2: A Prayer of Intercession

Jesus, full of love and mercy, watch over our sister and brother migrants. Have compassion and protect them as they suffer mistreatment and humiliation along their way, as they encounter distrust and marginalization. Touch with your goodness the hearts of all those who see them pass by. Help us to respect them and treat them with dignity. Take care of their families until they return home. Grant them the grace to return safely, not with broken hearts but with their hopes fulfilled. Prayer on the wall of the Community Centre for Migrants in Altar, Mexico.

Option 3: Prayers for the Referendum

Let us pray: God of hospitality, we pray for this upcoming Referendum,
that your will be done here in Alberta, as it is in heaven.

Make us instruments of your peace, joy and justice

God, we pray for communities whose voices might struggle to be heard in these days –
we name Indigenous Nations, peoples and organizations, we name migrant, newcomer and refugee
communities.

(space may be offered for other groups to be named here... together we say...)

Guide us, O great God of welcome

guide our footsteps to come alongside those most affected by the outcomes of this Referendum.

We know that we are a divided people.

Grant us a unity which is not a uniformity, but that leads to flourishing for all your people and all your creation.

Remind us that we are people of hospitality who are called to you your image in each and every person.

Call us into right relationship, deep listening, care and compassion
in times that often seem mean, harsh, divisive and polarized.

Make us witnesses of your jubilee, practitioners of your love.

Make our communities signs and symbols for your Reign.

(as appropriate, the community might be invited to speak their own prayers in a period of silence)

We offer these prayers – the prayers we have spoken [woven, candles we have lit] to the great God of Hospitality,
by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus our Sibling and Redeemer. **Amen.** Rob Shearer

A Call to Confession

The gathered community may wish to engage in an act of confession.

Why, O God, do our neighbours have to exhaust their strength to come work in our fields, care for our children, and build our homes? Why, O God, do we ask the most vulnerable to endure the hardship and abuses of work we will not do ourselves? Why, O God, do we allow the pursuit of profits to outweigh our sense of fairness? O God, have mercy on us. Based on a prayer from National farm worker ministry, US. Taken from Kairos resource, [here](#).

The Confession

God, we confess that we have not always loved you and welcomed you into our homes and hearts.

We have not loved our neighbours in the way you have called us to.

We have made and broken promises to you, to each other and to others nearby.

We have heard your ancient call to love, to hospitality, to mercy, to compassion, to care.

Forgive us for the times through our actions or inactions we created the conditions which have harmed others

We have not honoured to see your image in all people, to regard the image of Christ in all who are in need

Rob Shearer.

A brief silence is held to name the ways that we, individually or collectively have 'missed the mark' (sinned).

*If you would like a musical interlude, TLUS 102 **Nothing to Fear** or MV79 **Spirit Open My Heart** or MV85 – **Take, O Take Me as I Am** (from John Bell / the Iona Community) could be appropriate.*

The Assurance of God's Grace

The leader says these - or other words, as they see fit

The good news of the Gospel is that God is always a God of hospitality. Whatever we have done or left undone, God welcomes us home as we are, without one plea. As Dorothy Day once said: The Gospel takes away our right forever, to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor." And so it is that we all come in God's image, and God loves and forgives us, and there is nothing that can change that. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

The Peace

The peace of the welcoming Christ be with you!

And also with you.

Musical Response to God's Grace

If the community wishes to respond in song, here are some suggestions.

TLUS109 - **Beautiful Things** – This contemporary song speaks of how God makes beauty out of broken things.
MV62 – **There Is Room For All**

Response / Making A Covenant for Action

Some or all of the following actions could be offered as a way for the community to respond collectively and/or individually. Some of the links could be printed in a leaflet or put on a screen. There could be a challenge to create a covenant together, going forward, so that, in the weeks to come, some of the values we hold can be reflected in our actions.

- Without being partisan, one might seek from the gathered community a commitment to show up on October 19. Educate the community about the referendum – where to vote, and the format of the questions Questions 1-9 about immigration and access to services, and Question 10 about whether

Alberta should remain part of Canada. Questions are available on the Elections Alberta website:

<https://www.elections.ab.ca/elections/referendum/>.

- **kNOw the 9** gives one perspective on how to vote. Review their approach and see if you agree with it. Does it match the values of your Christian faith?
- Seek to listen to and amplify the voices of migrant and refugee communities around the referendum. There are numerous new migrant and diasporic United Church of Canada communities of Faith happening in Alberta and across the country. What might it mean to approach one of them to hear their stories and ask about adversity they faced in coming to Canada, or that they face now in the current climate here?
- How can the Community of Faith support people to vote? Could this include carpooling, childcare, being sure folks have proper ID, knowing that folks know where to vote in your community?
- Perhaps there are newcomer services, coalitions for the common good or a migrant community of faith (United Church or not) in your own community that you might be able to contact in order to hear the hopes and fears of migrant and refugee communities around the referendum and the wider context of crack down on immigration both across the border and in Canada. With either a faith community or not, what could it mean to send a group to listen to their stories, and to seek understanding on how the 9 Referendum questions, or in a national context, how legislation such as Bill C12 ([see info here](#)) is effecting communities and families whose members are facing deportation without process or what the loss of full access to essential services such as healthcare or education might mean for them.
- What might it mean to have one of these communities tell the story of the hopes and struggles of coming to Canada?
- Since we are praying through covenant, what would it mean to covenant as a community to support each other in engaging the Referendum as well as supporting each other to vote. A simple covenant might have commitments to God and each other to pray, educate and help those get to vote who might not have the means (such as transportation, knowledge of how to register, and understanding of the questions.

Sending

The leader can share these or other words as folks are sent.

As we are sent, we are reminded that we are a people of hospitality. We go, assured that, so much as welcome others, we too are welcomed by God. We go called to come alongside communities who are in fear of what might happen in the days and weeks to come. We go with the Story of Christ Jesus, the power of the Spirit and the Source of All into the world They created. We go now in love. **Amen.**

Possible Closing Hymns

One of these, or another hymn – perhaps from the Hymn Society resource noted at the beginning of this liturgy - can be sung.

Your Peace Will Make Us One (not in hymnals). This re-write of the Battle Hymn of the Republic (originally penned by suffragette pacifist Julia Ward Howe in 1861. [Here is a recording](#) from Wall Street United Church in Brockville ON, and you can find lyrics and you can find the lyrics and video for Audrey's version [here](#).

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TLUS 123 - Lift Every Voice and Sing. This is also known as the “Black National Anthem” and speaks of God’s presence through the collective toils and tribulations of life.

MV120 - My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning) – this rousing paraphrase of the Magnificat / Song of Mary dreams of another world. You can watch a Celtic-inspired recorded version [here](#).

These liturgies have been curated by Rev. Rob Shearer, an ordained UCC minister who is a Growth and Stewardship Animator with the General Council Office, and previously Regional Minister for Church Planting with Pacific Mountain Regional Council and a church planter with the AbbeyChurch and co-founder of the neo-monastic Emmaus Community. You can contact Rob at rshearer@united-church.ca or see his writings / sermons at www.robshearer.org (opinions strictly his own)

