

“The World of the Generous Gets Larger and Larger”
Worship Resources
Coordinated with the 2008 UCC Stewardship Theme Materials
and lectionary readings for these Sundays

I. “The Giving Connection”

Sunday, October 19

Call to Worship

adapted from Psalm 96 and Psalm 99

One: God rules over all creation with justice and tender love,
Many: So let all the peoples say, “Holy is God!”
One: From the rising of the sun to its setting in the west,
God watches over the nations of the earth,
Many: So let all the peoples say, “Holy is God!”
One: God forms light and creates darkness;
God creates the world in justice and love.
Many: So let all the peoples say, “Holy is God!”
One: As God’s own people, then, we gather to honor God
And to sing God’s goodness and grace,
Many: So let all the peoples say, “Holy is God!”

Invocation

Holy God, this morning you call us, each one of us by name, and gather us here to become your church in this place. Your presence sustains us in every hour. Your Word creates in this church and this people a community of love, justice, and peace, so that we might become much more powerful together than any of us could be on our own. Today, like the hungry crowd on a hillside that Jesus fed so long ago, we open ourselves as your church to the transforming power of your generosity and tender care. Today, fed by your grace, we join in your holy work to transform the world with mercy and love. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Forgive us, tender and merciful God, for our limited thinking and our meager hope. We have kept the field of our vision too narrow to see the boundless mercies you rain upon us to restore our spirits and our lives. We have failed to feel, and to trust, in your presence as you travel with us every step of our way. Our fears have kept us separate from one another, making us less on our own than we might be together. Heal us, we pray, of our impulse to grasp and to hold to ourselves the gifts that you give all of us to share with one another. Open our hearts to the abundant blessings of this beautiful world. Widen our embrace, broaden our vision, deepen our faith, and raise our hope so that our own world will indeed grow larger with justice, mercy, and love. Let your grace restore and heal this world through the workings of your people, together, in your name. Amen.

Assurance of Grace

One: The mercies of God are new each morning, and this morning God forgives us and sets us free from everything that limits our hope for our own lives, the life of this community, and the life of the world.

All: Thanks be to God!

Invitation to the Offering

In our own time and place, we are living, breathing messages of God's love for the world. This is our work of faith, our labor of love, and our steadfast hope in Jesus Christ. Like the earliest Christians, we are here in this place because of the commitment, faith, and generosity of others who shared the good news of the gospel in their own time. We feel that connection with them, and we turn now, in our time, to share our faith and our commitment through generous giving to support the ministry of this church in Christ's name. Let us gather our gifts together and offer them to God in gratitude and praise.

Prayer of Dedication

Bless these gifts, generous God, that we give together, as a community of faith, not alone, not apart from one another. As our generosity grows, make of our lives "the things that are yours," holy and joy-filled, trusting and founded rock-solid on faith in you. We dedicate these gifts as an offering of praise and thanksgiving for your love that sustains us from everlasting to everlasting. May they open up new possibilities and the promise of good news for this world you have created in goodness and love. Amen.

II. "One Big Soul"

Sunday, October 26

Call to Worship

adapted from Psalm 90

One: O God, you have been our dwelling place in all generations;

All: from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

One: Before the earth and its mountains and seas were formed,

All: from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

One: In the past that is a dream

and in the future that stretches beyond our sight or imagination,

All: from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

One: Let your work in this present age be seen in our work,

and your power made known in deeds of justice and peace.

All: From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

One: From everlasting to everlasting, you are our God.

All: Prosper, then, the work of our hands, we pray!

Invocation (all)

You are here with us in this place, gracious God, here with us every moment of our lives. We are here this morning because of the one true thing that guides our lives and steadies us in every circumstance: your love. We believe that underneath every difference we experience is one great Spirit of love. Hold us together, we pray, in this place and hour of worship, and then hold us together in spirit when we leave this time, nourished by prayer and fellowship, to go out into your world and be a blessing of hope for all people. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Forgive us, tender and merciful God, for missing the point again and again. We fail to see to the heart of the matter, the simple truth of the law of love. Instead, our fears build up protective walls of judgment and self-righteousness, of material possessions and the security we think they bring. We use your good creation to distance ourselves from one another and the

suffering of the world, a world we keep small and manageable for ourselves. Free in our hearts the power you have given us to see in each of your children your own presence so that we might love each one as we love ourselves. Give us generous spirits so that we will no longer offer you a partial loyalty, a partial obedience, a partial love. This morning, we begin our lives again, open to the possibility of wholehearted love that will heal and restore a world broken by selfishness and greed. We begin our lives again this morning in the light of that beautiful hope. Amen.

Assurance of Grace

One: By the power of God's generosity and grace, we begin our lives again this day,
walking in the radiant light of God's forgiveness and grace.

All: Thanks be to God!

Call to Offering

All the rules and laws of our faith can be summed up in the law of love for God and one another. Everything "hangs" on that – the law of love. We don't just talk about love here at [this] United Church of Christ; we bring it to life in ministry: we offer hospitality, we build community, we act in compassion, we work for justice, and in all these things we worship and love God, and share God's love with our neighbor. That is what this ministry, and our gifts, are about, and all of it "hangs on" love. Let us gather our gifts together and offer them to God in gratitude and praise.

Prayer of Dedication

Our hearts are full with gratitude and hope this day: we are deeply grateful for all of your blessings in our lives, O God, and we are hopeful that our own gifts will be a blessing for the world. We set our hearts this day on sharing the good news of your love with more than words. We set our hearts on sharing your abundance in our lives through the ministry of this church, beyond these walls and reaching across this land, and around the world. Make our gifts a blessing to the world, and a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for your boundless goodness and overflowing grace. Amen.

III. "Don't Just Think about It"

Sunday, November 2

Call to Worship

One: Morning by morning and day by day, we walk in the light of God's love.

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: Morning by morning and day by day,
God's healing power refreshes the world and makes it new.

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: In every hour and every age,
God does marvelous deeds and invites us to be part of them.

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: In every hour and every age, let us worship God!

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

Invocation

Our every breath depends on you, God of faithfulness and love, each day of our lives. Send the breath of your Spirit into our hearts this day, into this time of prayer, and into our lives when we leave this place and return to the world you love so well. While we long to walk “on lofty places,” find us here this morning, together, trusting in one more day to learn and praise and give thanks for the wonderful things you bring to life in every day and every age. Form us into people of faith who trust you each day, who walk step by step in the light of your love. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

How often we have resolved, O God, to be better, to do better, to share more freely, to forgive more graciously. For awhile, we work at this great project and watch for signs of immediate success. We give up too soon in discouragement when we see that we have failed to be perfect, to do great and spectacular things, to change the world overnight. We fail to see and appreciate the progress of each day. Forgive us and heal our impatience; give us hearts and wills for the long run. Open our eyes and our hearts to the marvelous things possible in each day, and to the possibility that small things, day by day, will change the world in ways beyond our greatest imagination. Amen.

Assurance of Grace

One: God grants us “pardon for sin and a peace so enduring,”
this morning and every morning of our lives.

All: Thanks be to God!

Call to Offering

Practicing what we teach: the words and worship here in church are beautiful, but God cares just as much about what we do in every other hour of the week, and about what happens here at [this] United Church of Christ throughout the week. We are partners with God and with one another in this marvelous ministry, and our giving is one way that we practice what we teach: generosity and joy. Let us gather our gifts together and offer them to God in gratitude and praise.

Prayer of Dedication

Every new morning brings fresh opportunities for ministry, and every gift we give holds the promise of your love at work in the world. We offer these gifts from our hearts for the sake of a world hungry for good news, and we offer our lives each day for the sake of your reign of justice, peace, and love. Bless this offering today, and transform the world through generosity and faithfulness this day and every day of our lives. Amen.

IV. "More than Thankful"

**Sunday, November 9
Stewardship Sunday**

Call to Worship

adapted from Amos 5:24

One: We gather this morning to worship God in this place.

All: God cares for us in every morning and in every place of our lives.

One: God speaks to us today as a community of justice and peace:

"Let justice roll down like waters,

All: "and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

One: Our presence this morning is a prayer of thanksgiving and praise,

All: And our lives each day are an offering to God.

One: From many different places, from many circumstances and stories,

All: We come to worship the God of grace and glory!

Invocation

Your abiding love sustains us, O God, in every moment and every circumstance, in good times and in bad, in struggle and in victory, in loss and in gain. Your grace is the ever-present source of our very lives: grant us this morning a deep awareness that you are near. Grow in our hearts a childlike trust that enables us to feel your love underneath our struggles and beyond our doubt. Lead us today, we humbly pray, into deeper and greater faith in you, and set our hearts on the things of your own heart. We ask this grace on days of uncertainty and on days of firm resolve, in every hour of our lives. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Tender God, we are only human, and we know well how to complain in almost any circumstance. There is always scarcity somewhere: our wills falter and we lose our way, our expanding wants exceed even our deepest needs, our hearts fall short of forgiveness and patience for one another. And sometimes we actually *want* "less": less time to wait for what we want to happen, less effort from us to make the right things happen, less openness on our part to the hidden possibilities of new and unexpected circumstances. In all these times, we miss your boundless love surrounding us, keeping us afloat in every storm, widening our horizons and inviting us to new life and astonishing joy. Forgive us, heal us, and lead us to new life, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Grace

One: God's love knows no bounds, and God's grace no limits. We are forgiven this day!

All: Thanks be to God!

Call to Offering

There's a difference between planning and preparation. We can't plan the future that God holds, but we can prepare for each day by practices of generosity. Generosity helps us to forgive and to heal; it helps us to make peace in the world; it helps to bring justice and mercy to those in need. Our gifts this morning are one way we prepare for God's coming into the world in the most unexpected ways. Let us gather our gifts together and offer them to God in gratitude and praise.

Prayer of Dedication

Generous God, we hear your voice in the words of Amos, and we long to respond with deep gratitude and commitment, gratitude rolling down like waters and commitment like an ever-flowing stream in the life of this world. Our gifts today are signs of that gratitude and commitment in every day of our lives, especially the year ahead of us in the life of this church. Thank you for giving us the power and the opportunity to share with one another. Thank you for giving us all that we have and all that we are; we offer back to you our gifts [and our pledges] this day as a sign of our gratitude for your generosity in every season. Bless these gifts, and strengthen us in the giving, we pray. Amen.