



# **Deep • Bold • Daring Toward 2035**

**Prayer Practices to Engage Toward 2035 with your  
Community of Faith**

A Prayer of Learning to Listen for the Voice of Jesus

We are not alone,  
we live in God's world.  
We believe in God:  
who has created and is creating

## **Introduction | God is Doing a New Thing. Do We Perceive It?**

In the Hebrew scriptures, we read this in the prophet Isaiah (43:19):

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

Toward 2035 invites us to boldly claim the hope that God is at work in our world, our neighbourhood, The United Church of Canada, and our Community of Faith.

In *A Song of Faith* we proclaim

We sing of a church  
    seeking to continue the story of Jesus  
    by embodying Christ's presence in the world.  
We are called together by Christ  
    as a community of broken but hopeful believers,  
    loving what he loved,  
    living what he taught,  
    striving to be faithful servants of God  
    in our time and place.

In these words we are reminded that the church is not just an institution, but the body of Christ, Jesus' Beloved Community, placed by God to love and serve in a particular time and place.

In Toward 2035 we speak of The United Church that we will know in 2035 like this...

In The United Church of Canada, inspired, resilient, and diverse contextual communities of disciples seek to continue the story of Jesus by embodying Christ's presence in the world. The church is present and deeply connected coast-to-coast-to-coast in rural and urban settings, and in ecumenical and global relationships. Guided by hope-filled, adaptive, and effective ministry leaders, the denomination is increasingly multigenerational, multiracial, and intercultural.

We offer ourselves to be formed by the Holy Spirit into communities who reflect these words not for the sake of the survival of the institution but for the sake of our neighbours amongst whom we are called to continue Jesus' story.

These prayer resources are designed to serve that transformation, that we might become the church our neighbourhoods need, today, on the way toward 2035 and beyond. We join in God who has created and is creating. We join God in prayer.

## **A Prayer for Communities of Faith in The United Church of Canada**

Gracious and loving God  
You called into being  
This United Church of Canada  
One expression of Jesus'  
Beloved community,  
Here in the particularities  
Of our place and our time.  
For the past 100 years  
You have guided and sustained  
And called us back when we have erred.  
Now, as we look back  
We also look forward,  
Daring to believe  
That even among us  
Even in this very place  
You are doing a new thing.  
We long to perceive it  
Like a way through a wilderness  
For the sake of our neighbours  
For the sake of this world of beautiful  
And broken things  
Yearning to be made whole  
Yearning to be made new  
May we perceive and live into it. Amen.

## **Learning to Listen for the Voice of Jesus**

This listening Prayer is a guided meditation practice drawn from Brad Jersak's book, *Can You Hear Me: Tuning in to the God Who Speaks*.

It can be used for a small group such as a Board or Council, or a whole congregation.

It takes about 8 – 10 minutes for the guided reflection and 5- 10 minutes for sharing afterwards.

During the practice you are encouraged to use your imaginations to listen for the voice of Jesus. Often, when we're taught forms of silent prayer, we're encouraged to "let go" of the things in our minds, and the practice often uses the language of emptying.

In this practice, we're listening by actively engaging our imaginations, and rather than emptying ourselves, we're focused on being filled by the Spirit and the love of God. It's a practice that asks us to believe God will use our imaginations to communicate with us.

As we engage in this way it's important to remember that none of us hears perfectly.

As with all other skills, listening for God's voice takes practice, and there will be mistakes along the way. One of the most helpful ways to learn is by listening in community.

When we learn to listen in community, we can ask others to help us discern God's voice. We can also turn together to the scriptures and to our faith tradition and ask whether a particular message is in line with the way we understand God.

This exercise may not immediately seem connected to Toward 2035, but we believe it builds our capacity to listen, which is at the heart of Toward 2035.

This prayer requires one person to be ready to lead others. They should review the text several times. They may wish to adjust some words of the text depending on the people participating.

It is best if they have guided themselves through this meditation.

## **Prayer Practice: Listening Prayer**

The group practice of Listening Prayer will involve a leader guiding participants through the following stages:

Settling into the Space for Listening

An Encounter with Jesus

Closing Prayer to Break the Silence

### **Directions for Leading the Prayer (Introduction)**

- Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
- Imagine yourself in a safe place.
  - The place you choose might be real or imagined, perhaps a large open field on a warm day or hiking on a beautiful mountain trail, relaxing as you play video games or a place in the game itself.
  - Notice the smells, the sounds, and the temperature of the place that you've imagined.

*(allow a minute of silent reflection)*

- Imagine that Jesus has arrived to meet you in your safe place. Maybe he has arrived as a human being who politely knocks on the door before entering, or a presence in some other form, or as a felt sense within you, or maybe some combination of these things.

*(allow one minute of silence so that Jesus can settle in)*

### **Directions for Leading the Prayer (Option 1)**

- Jesus is going to speak with you about someone. It could be someone you've met before, or someone you've never met in person; it could even be a younger or older version of yourself. Simply ask, "Jesus, who is it that you'd like me to be talking with you about?"

*(allow thirty seconds to a minute of silence)*

- Spend some time in a conversation with Jesus about why he might want you to reflect on your relationship with that person. You will have about five/ten minutes of unbroken silence for this conversation to take place.

## **Directions for Leading the Prayer (Option 2)**

- Jesus is now going to offer you a gift. It could be something physical or it could be a word or a prayer that Jesus has for you. Take some time to receive the gift.

*(allow thirty seconds to a minute of silence)*

- Spend some time in a conversation with Jesus about the gift. You might begin by asking, "Jesus, why have you given me this gift today?" You will have about five/ten minutes of unbroken silence for this conversation to take place.

## **Direction for Leading the Prayer (Conclusion)**

*(after the time you named is over...)*

- I would now invite you to finish your conversation with Jesus with a short prayer of thanks to God for being present with you in this time, and as you finish that prayer, to open your eyes and rejoin the group in our shared space.

## **Reflections (Using Eric Law's Mutual Invitation)**

We will now move into our time of sharing, using a process developed by Eric Law called mutual invitation. One person will volunteer to share first. After they finish, they can then invite someone else in the circle to share by name. If you are invited you are free to share some of your experience, or "pass for now" which means that you would like to be invited to share again a little later. You may also "pass" in which case you will not be invited to share your experience later in this time of reflection. Whether you share, pass for now, or pass, you will conclude by inviting someone else in the circle. Is there anyone that would like to share first? (If not, you can volunteer to share.)

## A New Creed

We are not alone,  
we live in God's world.

We believe in God:  
who has created and is creating,  
who has come in Jesus,  
the Word made flesh,  
to reconcile and make new,  
who works in us and others  
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:  
to celebrate God's presence,  
to live with respect in Creation,  
to love and serve others,  
to seek justice and resist evil,  
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,  
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,  
God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

