

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also acknowledge that the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – have lived on this land since before settlers of European descent claimed ownership and displaced those for whom it was home. As we pursue our goals to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament this injustice in our history and commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

May we live with respect on this land and live in peace and friendship with its people.

➤ *Dance with the Spirit*

MV 156 (repeat)

Call to Worship

God hears our cries for help and rescues us from all our troubles.

God draws near the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

God redeems the life of all people; none who take refuge in God will be condemned.

So, let us worship the One lifts us to new life and praise God's holy name.

† Prayer

God of majesty and mystery, we come before you in humble wonder and worship. Source of all that is, you are beyond our imagining – your creation astounds us with its beauty and power. Word of hope and healing, you defy our explanations with your care. Spirit of purpose and possibility, you touch us when we least expect it and show us which way to turn. Receive our praise and prayer this day – and prepare us to receive your presence and promise in this time of worship,

God of mercy, with the community of Christ's church gathered here and elsewhere, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed. We have not loved you with our whole hearts, nor have we cared for your world or respected our neighbours as we should.

In silence, we offer our personal confessions...

Forgive us, we pray, and with your grace, remake us in the example of Christ, our Lord and friend, who invites us to pray together... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

Words of Hope

Jesus said, “Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Friends, trust that peace and forgiveness are God’s gifts to you this day. Be renewed by the power of the Spirit that moves with you into each new day.

➤ *What does the Lord require of you*

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A PCC Story of Mission ***The Spirit is With Us***

Boarding Homes Ministry provides comfort and companionship to people living in low-rent, inner-city housing — many of whom live under a crushing combination of mental illness, addiction and poverty. The ministry also works to increase the inclusion of people living with mental illnesses and to reduce social isolation wrought by stigma. This story comes to us from Kate McGee, Executive Director and Chaplain at Boarding Homes Ministry...

A few years ago, I met George, wild-haired and wild-eyed, at the door of his Parkdale boarding house. It was a typical Parkdale moment: I was arriving for a pastoral visit just as the firefighters were on their way out. It had been a false alarm.

We proceeded to the startling turquoise and yellow sitting room where George trained a skeptical eye on me and said, “What are you? Some kind of worker?”

“I’m a chaplain,” I offered, prepared to explain.

Unexpectedly, George lit right up. “A chaplain? I LOVE chaplains! We had those in prison!”

And so, a great friendship was born.

Over the better part of a year, we got to know George at our weekly visits. He was devastatingly funny, tossing a deadpan comment into a conversation that would make the whole room crack up. He had limitless enthusiasm and childlike glee. He loved to read the Bible with our team member Jim and listen to him play the banjo. As George came to trust us, we learned how hard his past was and how deeply he’d been hurt by people who were, in his words, “NOT kind and gentle.” It is a miracle that George stayed so tender-hearted despite the cruelty he had faced.

Over the summer, George looked increasingly unwell and distraught. Before we knew it, he was back in prison.

It took us months to find him, but he was so delighted when we showed up on the video screen one day (new high-tech prisons no longer let visitors see their loved ones through Plexiglas). He asked us about the banjo and proudly told us about his Bible class. Darker things emerged over time, too, like the fact that inmates in mental health crisis are placed in solitary confinement until they get better.

COVID-19 has made things hard for our ministry, as we’ve been forced to substitute letters and phone calls for those crucial in-person house visits. We really miss seeing the residents.

One great cause for celebration came from the unlikeliest place: those video screens. One thing we can say for them is that they are certainly germ-free. We get to see George again next week and we can hardly wait.

Working in this ministry is a lesson in finding small joys amid great pain. Sometimes problems are too big for a quick fix. The forces at work are too great, and systemic change takes time. Our little ministry is unlikely to end poverty or cure schizophrenia. But loneliness and isolation make both of those afflictions so much worse. And we can fight those by choosing to connect in the moment we're given. We can feel the Spirit right there with us, delighting in us as we delight in each other.

Scripture

Psalm 88

O Lord, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.

For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
I am counted among those who go down to
the Pit;

I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow.

Every day I call on you, O Lord;
I spread out my hand to you.
Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise you?
Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?

But I, O Lord, cry out to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
O Lord, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?
Wretched and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.
Your wrath has swept over me;
your dread assaults destroy me.
They surround me like a flood all day long;
from all sides they close in on me.
You have caused friend and neighbor to shun
me;
my companions are in darkness.

Reflection

If you read Psalm 88 and felt your heart hit the floor with a thud, you're not alone. This psalm doesn't get a lot of airtime. On the face of it, the psalmist is crying out to God for having abandoned them. It doesn't have a tidy resolution: it's the only psalm of lament that does not end in a vow to praise.

It's not rosy, but it's real. The psalmist refuses to give us hope — maybe because they don't feel any. Even so, this psalm is a balm, a gem, and can be a source of healing for the many people who still experience the feelings expressed here.

One of the most insidious things about mental illness is that it can cut people off from one of the greatest gifts of human existence: the capacity to be in relationship. A person experiencing mental illness can feel like a barrier has descended around them until they can no longer feel the love of friends and family. Ironically, it descends when people need the love of friends and family the most.

There's a double effect at work, too. When the psalmist writes "all my companions are in darkness," it may not be just because they can't see their companions. The companions may well have turned their backs. We do that sometimes. We turn our backs on a person who is suffering with mental illness for a lot of reasons, but one is that it is terrifying to see someone swallowed up by "the pit" the psalmist so aptly describes. We can't help but fear being sucked down to the bottom ourselves.

On the surface, Psalm 88 is one of total despair. But did you notice that the psalmist is still talking to God the whole way through? This person feels totally and utterly alone, but voicing their cry gives them away: they are still in relationship. They may not be able to feel it, but the God who created their heart to love, relate and cry out has not abandoned them. The psalmist writes, "in the morning my prayer comes before you." Their prayer continues unabated even when they feel most alone.

If we want to be the friend or neighbour who doesn't shun the suffering person, if we want to love despite futility and fear, we have to look the darkness right in the face. We can't be looking for a quick fix.

For our model we need look no further than the silent partner in this psalm. Our God says: I will be here for you even when you can't feel my presence. I will love you even when you don't know I love you. Our hearts were made for this: to love God and one another.

I wonder if any of you have had times in your life when you felt cut off from the love of God and others. I wonder how you reconnected.

I know I have felt lonely or overwhelmed on occasion in my life. I am thankful to have gotten through those times with help from family, friends and faith. I wonder if you have had similar experiences.

Sometimes we feel powerless to help someone who is suffering – we don't know what we can do to help. I wonder if there is a problem you care about that feels too big to manage on your own right now. Maybe you can connect with someone or show your care in a way other than trying to "fix" the problem. Maybe we can all commit to taking a small step this week.

† Prayer

Loving God, we praise you for your loving faithfulness, and we thank you because you will never leave us or forsake us. We thank you for the shelter of your mercy in vulnerable times. In the times of our loneliness, give us the grace to sense your presence. In times when we are caring for someone who is ill and cannot feel our own love or care, grant us patience and forbearance.

We pray for Boarding Homes Ministry as they find new ways to minister to people who are isolated and abandoned, especially during this time of higher isolation for many people. And we pray for people living with mental illness who feel deeply alone. Give us the great expansiveness of love through your Holy Spirit, so that we may always welcome strangers. Light up our paths, so we can see that every loving connection is a way home to you Holy One. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

➤ *Jesus bids us shine*

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A PCC Story of Mission ***Shining God's Light in Saskatoon***

Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry provides prayer, crisis counselling, nourishment, clothing and a weekly worship circle to people living on the margins of society. The ministry gives people of all nations a sense of belonging, care and inclusion through activities that uphold Indigenous cultural practices.

God's unfailing love never gives up, even when things seem hopeless. The staff and volunteers at Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry (SNCM) always strive to display this kind of love to the community they serve. People who come to the centre, many living in extreme poverty or experiencing homelessness, find a welcoming space where they can enjoy a hot meal with friends, discover their artistic gifts and receive spiritual care. SNCM is a constant in the lives of the people it serves, who know that they can come as they are and be cared for.

When COVID hit, people who rely on the services of SNCM suddenly faced even more challenges. So, as the city of Saskatoon closed down, SNCM moved to the streets. Staff and volunteers prepared food, then put on masks and gloves and delivered it to people who were hungry. They also offered friendly words, prayers and messages of hope.

Executive Director Dylon Nippi is grateful that SNCM was able to continue to be a helpful and loving presence during the pandemic. When he thinks about the work SNCM has done over the last few months, the scripture that comes to mind is Matthew 5:14–16, about being a light on a hill. In difficult times, fear and uncertainty can drive us to retreat when God is calling us to move forward. We are tempted to hide our light. But this verse reminds us that God's light cannot be hidden.

The experience of embodying God's everlasting love on the streets of Saskatoon has given SNCM a renewed sense of courage and strength in the Holy Spirit that they carry with them as they move back to ministering at the centre.

Scripture

Matthew 5: 14-16

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Reflection

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.” We are called to shine the light of the gospel in a world that is steeped in darkness, and to radiate God’s love and truth into the lives of people around us.

During the pandemic, Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry was committed to letting God’s light shine, even though it meant changing the way they usually serve in a drastic way. In a time of uncertainty and darkness, God’s light was revealed as staff and volunteers went out into the community and attended to the physical and spiritual needs of the people they encountered.

SNCM’s faithful and courageous ministry in this difficult time can be an inspiration to us. God’s light is constantly shining, making itself known, ray by ray, through everyday acts of service.

God’s light, which cannot be hidden, is constant. I wonder who or what has been consistently revealing this light to you over the last year. I wonder how that revelation of God’s light has helped you during the pandemic or at another time of struggle.

We’ve been living through a challenging and fearful time, yet God’s light continues to shine through us. I wonder how you have been a ray of light in your family or community.

God always calls the Christian community to be visible and present so I wonder what opportunities are there for us – for Knox and Trinity – to be Christ’s presence in our neighbourhoods.

➤ *I heard the voice of Jesus say*

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† Prayer

God of light, we thank you that you are always with us, you never grow weary and your love is unfailing. Make your everlasting presence known to the world so that all of creation may experience the healing power of your love.

We pray for people in the SNCM community and all Indigenous ministries. Open our eyes Loving Creator to the challenges Indigenous people face due to systemic racism and oppression and the disproportionate ways their communities have been affected by the pandemic. May your justice will prevail so that healing is experienced by all who suffer unjustly.

Give strength to those who are discouraged and renewal to those who are exhausted. Give power to those who are excluded. Help us to move forward in times of darkness so that we can shine your light as we are called. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

† Offering and Prayer

Through Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service & Development, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is sharing Christ's love in 25 countries. Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing – which Knox includes as part of our yearly budget – provide grants and mission staff to encourage, equip and accompany our mission partners in areas such as Bible translation, leadership development, evangelism, outreach and Christian service. PWS&D supports development work and provides relief in times of emergency. Inspired by God's promise of abundant life, PWS&D envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world. Thank you for your generosity to Knox and the work of our church.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Lord Jesus, we bring our gifts to you, knowing that you have given yourself for us, so that we have life in abundance. Bless these gifts. May they become the source of such abundance in lives we touch through mission and ministry for your sake. Amen

Blessing

God invites us to abundant life in Christ – live each day with joy and thanksgiving! And may the grace of the living Lord, the love of God, and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*

Prayer for Those Affected by Wildfires (taken from the PCC website)

Creator God, all things look to you to give them life and sustenance.

We are filled with gratitude and wonder at the beauty and power of nature and the forces in it. And we are filled with fear and shock when we witness and experience the power of destruction at work in the world. In humility, we confess our sin and admit that too often our actions and inaction unleash and encourage the powers of destruction in your world.

Look in mercy and kindness on all people and hear our prayers for those lands and all those whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by the fires here and around the world.

Guide and bless the people who give their talent, time and strength to fight and prevent fires and those who support them.

Protect those in danger, help the injured, comfort the grieving, and soothe the anxious. And help us to serve and support with our deeds as well as our prayers.