

## 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

Holy God, you call us to worship.

**In your presence, we seek truth and forgiveness.**

Holy God, you call us to worship you.

**In your presence, we seek the grace to forgive one another.**

Holy God, you call us to worship you, heart, body, mind and soul.

**So, we gather to offer you our prayer and praise with joyful thanks.**

## † Prayer

Faithful God, in the world of your creation, you made the seasons to change – the sun to shine and the rain to fall – the vines to bear fruit and the fields to produce good things. You alone are our strength and security – you alone bring us rest and comfort. We turn to you as the source of all life, marvelling at your wisdom – seeking to learn your purpose for our lives. We offer you our praise and thanksgiving, for you are the God who made us, the Christ who mends us, and the Spirit who brings us life.

Faithful God, even though we know you are the Source of our lives, we confess we often turn our backs on you. We speak and think in ways that deny our loyalty and love for you – we ignore our own needs and the needs of others. We harbour anger and say things that cause others pain. In your mercy, restore us to right relationships with you and with one another as we pray together in Jesus' name... ***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

While it is true that we have all sinned, it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ. To all who humbly seek the mercy of God, our sin is forgiven. Be at peace with God, with yourself, and with one another.

➤ *What does the Lord require of you*

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### A PCC Story of Mission    ***Radical Acts of Kindness***

Presbyterians Sharing helps Cariboo Presbyterian Church reach out with the love of Christ to people who live in the rural and remote areas of the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of British Columbia. Two Rivers Church in Guelph, Ontario, is exploring new ways of being the church. A recipient of the PCC's Supporting Ministry Grant, the ministry is made up of "Living Rooms," where people gather together in homes for meals and conversations that draw them deeper into friendship and spiritual formation in Christ.

Nestled between the Coast Mountains and the Rocky Mountains is a region of British Columbia called the Interior Plateau—a breathtaking wilderness consisting of grass-filled valleys and rocky ridges with forests and deep blue lakes scattered throughout. The communities in the northern part of the Cariboo-Chilcotin region are small and spread out with many miles between them. Most of these towns and villages are accessible only by driving countless hours through winding back roads. Despite the distance, Christians living in these communities are connected through a house church ministry called Cariboo Presbyterian Church.

Halfway across the country is Two Rivers Church in Guelph, a vibrant community of over 120,000 people, located in the heart of southern Ontario. It is a city rich in music, arts and culture. The magnificent limestone Basilica of Our Lady Immaculate stands watch over the downtown area, and there are many places of worship, including four traditional Presbyterian churches. But some people are more comfortable in a less-traditional setting. So, Two Rivers Church offers a house-church model of "living rooms" where people gather for meals and conversations that draw them deeper into friendship and spiritual growth.

These two congregations, meeting in very different settings for different reasons, have something in common besides their house church ministries: each has made the intention to serve their neighbours through small acts of service and hospitality. The vision is simple, but the impact is great.

"We seek to follow Jesus' example by providing care and support to those who are in need, and by serving them in practical ways," said the Rev. Mark Carter, minister at Cariboo Presbyterian Church. Acts of hospitality have included yard work for elderly people, meals for families grieving the loss of a loved one, and community bike tune-up and repair days.

Two Rivers is also seeking to be a blessing in their community by responding to the needs of their neighbours. Something as simple as walking a neighbour's dog during work hours can

create a relationship of trust. With each act of kindness, members of Two Rivers are making an impact in their neighbourhood and providing an example of what it looks like to be part of God's church. If you ask them what God is up to, they will respond, "God is making all things new."

While baking a pie, shovelling snow or driving a neighbour to the doctor may not appear to be radical acts at first glance, reaching out in kindness is in fact counter-cultural behavior in a world that too often has valued individualism and consumerism over conversation and connection.

For many of us, outreach is part of our collective church experience. It is easy to forget that we are called, not just as a church, but as individuals, to go out into our communities and share the good news of the gospel message. Sharing the love of Christ with a neighbour can seem as daunting as scaling one of the Rocky Mountains or ascending the spire of the Basilica in Guelph. But as we open ourselves to God's love, and share that love through acts of generosity, friendship and kindness, God's healing and transformation can be experienced. And people's lives can be made new

### .Scripture

#### **John 13: 34-35**

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

### Reflection

In John 13: 34, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment—to love one another as he loved them. This is not a passive love, but a call to action – a call to care for others and put love into everyday activities. And by doing so, to be recognized as a follower of Christ.

How many times do we hurry past someone on the street or in the hallway of our apartment building or workplace without acknowledgment? How many times do we leave church without greeting a newcomer? How often are we too busy to check in with our own friends and family, let alone people we don't know? Without reaching out, we have no way of knowing the context in which others are living or the joys and challenges that they experience. We have no way of knowing how we might offer care or hospitality.

Hospitality is a notion that is deeply rooted in the Bible. It allows people to experience a taste of God's love and grace through their interactions with one another. Jesus loved others by providing for them in practical ways – ministering to their physical and emotional needs as well as spiritual. When we pay attention to the people around us and seek to understand their needs, we can form relationships and offer hospitality through simple acts of kindness and service. And they'll know that we are Christians by our love.

Think about the community where you live. Think about who your neighbours are and how well you know them. I wonder if there are strangers in your neighbourhood you could connect with.

It can be difficult to go outside of our safety zones and extend God's love to strangers. I wonder how you could get to know people in your community.

It is even more difficult if people are quite different from us. I wonder how we can listen to people who live on the margins or across boundaries.

I wonder how you would define Christian hospitality today and how you seek to embody it as an individual. How do our congregations share Christ's hospitality in our community? I wonder what hospitality challenges we face that we might help one another with.

➤ *We are one in the Spirit*

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### † Prayer

Loving God, we praise you for being a God whose love stretches across all borders and boundaries. No location and no situation is too remote for your love to reach. Thank you for modeling for us your generous love in the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. We give thanks for Cariboo Presbyterian Church and Two Rivers Church as they bless their communities through loving service that sends out ripples of change, allowing new life to emerge in hopeless places. Forgive us for when we erect borders in our minds that block us from sharing that love with others. Remake our hearts so that we may reflect your love and help us to find ways to gladly share our gifts, service, food and lives with our neighbours in Jesus' name. Amen

➤ *Lord of all power*

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### A PCC Story of Mission    **Connecting with Community**

Erskine Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ontario, has been sharing God's love for 150 years. With support from Presbyterians Sharing, through the Presbytery of Hamilton's Replanting Ministry, Erskine went through a discerning process in 2018 and is working to create a wellness hub for the wellbeing of their community.

While God's message of love, hope, faith and peace stays the same, the way we do ministry may change. Change isn't easy, especially for a congregation with 150 years of history. But recognizing that God was calling them to do something new in their neighbourhood, the congregation at Erskine Presbyterian Church spent 2018 engaged in an intentional process of discernment. They worked and prayed diligently through monthly workshops, discernment meetings and consultations with neighbours until they had a firm vision of who they were called to be: "A healthy, loving family for each and every neighbour."

In 2019, Erskine called the Rev. Mike Aldred as their new minister. Seeing how the community around them had changed, and asking how they could best serve that community, they decided they wanted

to become a wellness hub – a safe and welcoming space where people from the community could gather and local organizations could offer services and support to promote wellbeing.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and the plan of creating the hub had to be put on hold, Erskine held fast to their vision. They still wanted to connect with their community.

When it became evident that many people in the area were in extra need of help because of the pandemic, the leaders at Erskine decided to contact their local city councillor. They asked her, “What would you do if you had volunteers, money and a strong desire to help others at this time?” She put them in touch with the Strathcona Community Care Response — a grassroots group of people in the neighbourhood who were rallying together to offer care and support to their community in response to COVID-19.

Erskine discovered that the Strathcona group had already been fundraising, bringing groceries and supplies to those struggling financially, and engaging in friendly phone calls with people who were isolated for several weeks. Their volunteers were tired, but it was obvious that the needs were still great, and the pandemic was not going to be over anytime soon. The leaders at Erskine told the hardworking group of volunteers that they were there to help in any way they could.

More funds were needed, so Erskine spent a month fundraising. More volunteers were needed, so people from Erskine started helping with grocery pickup and delivery. More food was needed, so congregation members helped to restock the community pantry. More phone calls were needed, so Erskine participated in calling people who were lonely in their neighbourhood.

“The timing of when we joined the Strathcona Community Care Response seemed God-ordained,” said the Rev. Aldred. “When they were getting to the end of their rope, Erskine was able to inject generosity, time and energy into the project so that it could continue for a month longer than expected.” The experience of serving alongside their neighbours confirmed for Erskine what God had been leading them to in their visioning process: that being a faithful member of a neighbourhood family means looking to see where God is already at work and being willing to join in.

## Scripture

### **Acts 16: 11-15**

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, *“If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.”* And she prevailed upon us.

## Reflection

One of the major themes of the Book of Acts is the Holy Spirit sending people out to share the gospel. In Acts 16, Paul and Barnabas have been joined by Timothy on their second missionary journey. Their plan was to enter Asia, but “the Holy Spirit blocked that route” (16:6). Instead, the Holy Spirit sent them to Macedonia (modern day Greece) by giving Paul a vision of a Macedonian man asking him to come.

When the three missionaries arrived in Greece, they made their way to Philippi. Just outside the city gates, down by the river, they met a woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God and dealer of purple cloth. Although not much is known about Lydia, Acts clearly demonstrates that the relationship she developed with the missionaries was mutually beneficial. God opened Lydia’s heart to hear Paul’s message, and she and her household were soon baptized. In turn, she invited the traveling missionaries to come and stay at her home, which became the site of the church in Philippi.

Like the travelling missionaries in Acts, the leaders at Erskine listened when the Holy Spirit took them in a new direction. They held fast to their vision but adapted to the circumstances in which they found themselves. Like Paul, Barnabas and Timothy, who went down to the river on the sabbath to find worshippers of God because there wasn’t an official synagogue in Philippi, the leaders of Erskine went out into their neighbourhood when their official place of worship was no longer open for gathering. The Spirit sent them out to meet the people running the Strathcona Community Care Response—the “Lydias” through whom God was already working in their neighbourhood. The partnership that Erskine developed with Strathcona Community Care Response can best be described as a gift from the Holy Spirit meant to bless the community during a difficult time.

Paul, Barnabas and Timothy were prevented by the Holy Spirit from going in a certain direction and then sent in another. I wonder if you have ever experienced God closing one path and opening another one.

I wonder what that teaches us about how God moves in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of Christians today as powerfully as the Spirit was during the missionary journeys described in Acts. Reflect on your past and think of a time when it felt like the Holy Spirit was guiding you. I wonder how you were able to discern the Spirit’s presence.

I wonder how the Spirit is speaking in each of our lives today or where God may be calling our congregations to connect with our community?

How might God be calling us to contribute to the efforts of people and organizations in our neighbourhood? How does it feel when we work with others on a common goal?

➤ *Go ye, go ye into the world*

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## † Prayer

May your wisdom and power, O Holy Spirit of God, descend on all congregations discerning and moving forward with new visions. Help them to trust you as their guide. Draw them nearer to their neighbours. Continue to guide Erskine as they pursue the vision they've been given and grow their relationships with community members as they transform their space into a wellness hub. May the eyes and hearts of all congregations within The Presbyterian Church in Canada be opened so that they might discern where God is calling them in their communities. Trusting in you, we place all future plans in your hands and give ourselves over to your guidance. 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

The Lord is your strength and shield – the one in whom your heart may trust. The grace of the risen Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*