# Logo of The United Church of Canada purpose statement: a 3-petal flower in gold, navy blue, and red with the words Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice, and Deep Spirituality in a circle around the outside.

# Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice:Worship Service

## Greeting

The United Church has new vision and purpose statements. These are key elements of a strategic plan designed to shape the next three years. The Vision reads:

Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.

## Land Acknowledgement

## Call to Worship

One: Why? That is the question.
 Why are we here?
 Is it convention, a loyalty to the traditions of our parents?

**All: Our parents were guides but being here is our choice.**

One: Is it habit, the practice of a lifetime?

**All: Habits we perform without thinking but being here is our choice.**

One: Is it friendship, the tie to others?

**All: These ties bind us but being here is our choice.
 We choose to come**

One: for our lives to be transformed

**All: for the transformation of the world.
 Let us come and worship God!**

## Opening Prayer

## Hymn

“Will You Come and Follow Me” (*Voices United* 567)

## Exploring the New Purpose Statement

The new purpose statement of the United Church involves three key phrases:

Deep spirituality
Bold discipleship
Daring justice

Today, let us explore each line and the insights it offers for our personal faith experience and our witness as Christ’s church. Turning to the first line, Deep Spirituality.

(The three reflections that follow could be used as inspiration for your own.)

### Reflection: Deep Spirituality

Bill’s response shocked me. We were completing an exercise in confirmation class. The program involved a monthly session with youth in Grade 9 and their mentors. Each young person was partnered with an adult in the congregation. They attended the monthly session together and then had a second meeting with just the two of them, following an outline that explored the subject of the class further. This session was on prayer.

All class activities were undertaken by both youth and mentors. Early in the lesson, I invited them to take their place along a line. At one end of the line were those who never prayed outside of worship and at the other were those who prayed daily. It was my experience, bearing in mind this was 20 years ago, that even the youth often fell in the middle. Many of them had been taught bedtime childhood prayers that they sometimes still recited. What I was not prepared for was one of the adults to land at never, but that was what Bill did.

Bill was a retired educator that I recruited as a mentor because he was skilled at drawing out young people who were there because their parents had forced them to be. I often paired him with the young person I expected to engage least. Bill would connect with them and they would attend and participate. Bill was a trustee and a member of the church council. He had words of wisdom and insight in each of these settings. I valued his input. Most Sundays, he attended worship. Bill also had a grandchild who needed a heart transplant before their first birthday, so his experience with stress was first-hand. But here he was sharing that he never prayed.

To be fair to Bill, I suspect he was more typical than atypical of the men of his generation. Many years earlier, one of my predecessors had held a monthly men’s lunch where the men in the congregation shared a meal and discussed a topic. But that had long ended. Unless they attended a study group, there was no opportunity for men to gather to pray beyond worship compared to the opportunity UCW provided women for spiritual growth. Once the shock passed, dismay took its place. How had the church so failed Bill that we had not given him the tools to draw close to God?

That is what spirituality is: drawing close to God. In worship, we do that corporately—as a congregation. But what tools do we have to do it privately? Prayer is certainly one. Prayer is opening our lives to God. It can be with words or through music or using many other forms. For some people, it is solitude in nature. For others, it is quieting and settling themselves with tools like meditation or mandalas, the original adult colouring activity. For me, it is writing in a journal.

For Bill it was worship, and that experience formed him into a man dedicated to serving his church. I only wonder how much more personal that experience may have been for him if he had had other tools, like one of these forms of prayer or a group with whom to study, to deepen his intimacy with God.

What our new mission statement says is that this experience of intimacy with God is the starting point for each of us. It is grounded in worship and prayer, study and scripture. Deep spirituality is the joy of those who know they are loved and held by God and who long to run into God’s embrace. Deep spirituality is the cornerstone of our identity, not just as a church but also as individuals.

### Hymn

“Take Time to Be Holy” (VU 672)

### Reflection: Bold Discipleship

One of the movies in which Laurence Fishburne acts is *Akeelah and the Bee*. Fishburne is the teacher who commits to work with 11-year-old Akeelah to prepare her to compete at the National Spelling Bee.

Akeelah is keen to pursue this, but partway through the preparation she loses focus. Fishburne has set her the task of memorizing boxes of words, and she is rather bored with the enterprise. Her approach leads him into a discussion of discipline that forever changed my understanding of discipleship.

Fishburne explains that discipline is what gives life to learning. The word *discipline*, like the word *disciple*, comes from the Latin *discipulus*, meaning pupil. Like discipline, discipleship is the act of giving life to learning.

If spirituality is intimacy with God, then discipleship is how that intimacy shapes us. Discipleship is where our understanding of God connects with our lives. We are now in the Season after Epiphany in the church year, the period after Jesus’ birth and baptism, in which we remember Jesus’ public ministry and those who followed him. Stories of those closest to him, of his disciples, dominate the scripture readings for this period. It is a time focused on call.

In today’s reading from John, we witness the moment that Jesus was called to leave his private life to take up his public ministry. He has been in the community as the son of Joseph. He has cared for his mother and his younger siblings, who at this point appear to have been raised. He attends a wedding, and when the wine runs out his mother nudges him. Has she been watching from the sidelines wondering when he would take up the calling she believed he had? Has she been worried that his sense of family obligation is standing in the way of his future? Has she sensed a restlessness in him? Jesus is none too happy with her prodding. He appears to be willing to continue as is, with a quiet life not much different from that of his neighbours. But whether it is his mother’s prompting or his own yearning, the moment has come when Jesus needs his life to reflect his identity, and he changes the water into wine. It’s a turning point in his life, or as the writer of John calls it, it’s the first of his miracles.

This is often how we speak about call, as though it is a dramatic moment where life changes completely. Consequently, we often only discuss call for people like myself, people whose lives are obviously shaped by a decision born of faith. But we do a disservice when we do that. We miss seeing how our personal stories are connected to God’s holy story.

Take my mother for example. My mom was a woman of deep faith, but I suspect if you asked her what her calling was she would have fumbled for an answer. Yet to me, from the outside it was obvious. My mom fed people. She was forced to leave school early to care for her younger sisters due to her own mother’s illness. When she left home, it was to work as a domestic. Then she served in the navy as an officers’ cook. After the war she was responsible for the cashiers in a Toronto-based chain of supermarkets. When she quit working to have a family, apart from caring for us and entertaining others she was always the person in charge of meals at the church: fundraising meals, celebratory meals, and so forth. In fact, when friends of ours described the church as God’s house, their three-year-old daughter asked if Grace, my mom, cooked God’s meals! Long before the practice was widespread, my mom was part of initiatives to make sure struggling families had the supplies they needed for a Christmas feast. In every experience in her life she was devoted to helping people have the nourishment they needed. Surely that is just as sacred a calling as mine to serve as an ordained minister!

Discipleship is seeing how our lives are a sacred calling and, out of our faith, connecting our gifts with the world’s needs. Discipleship is how our lives become avenues of God’s love and presence in the world. Let us not be hesitant in understanding or embracing this but rather bold in claiming every moment of every day and every activity as an expression of how God is caring for the world through us.

### Gospel Lesson

John 2:1‒11

### Reflection: Daring Justice

In the Bible, especially in the Hebrew Scriptures, two words are often paired: righteousness and justice. Righteousness is to be in right relationship with God. Righteousness is the experience of deep spirituality and bold discipleship; it is the bond between God and us that shapes our lives. Justice is the bond between God and God’s people that shapes the world. Justice is what moves faith from the individual experience of “me in my small corner” to all of us as the church together in the world. If discipleship is what shapes our lives, justice is what shapes our world.

Justice is when each of us brings our different gifts together as one. Justice is living as the body of Christ is described in 1 Corinthians 12. Although today’s reading ends with this list of gifts, what follows is the famous passage where Paul likens the church to a body, noting that a body needs many parts just as the body of Christ needs many gifts. Justice is when the gifts of God’s people come together to seek the transformation of the world. Justice is when United Church people and United Church congregations work together to sponsor refugees in response to the Syrian crisis. Justice is when United Church people and congregations support the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to be able to provide food in emergency situations and to promote long-term food security around the globe. Justice is when United Church people and congregations admit our painful role in residential schools and commit to reconciliation. While Canadians may have been both shocked and surprised by unmarked graves, I think many United Church folk only had their worst fears confirmed. We already knew how destructive residential schools had been and what a painful chapter our participation in them is in our life as a church. Justice is when United Church people and congregations march in Pride parades and speak out against the violence suffered by the Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ community. Justice is when our response is collective and transformative. Justice is bringing our different gifts together to move the world closer to God’s intention for fullness of life for all.

Daring justice is when we respond to the world in faith, not out of fear. Many congregations are mired in fear because the future of communities of faith in general and of the community they love in particular are uncertain. Their decisions become guided by what involves the least risk: the least risk of upsetting someone, the least risk to their financial sustainability, the least risk on many different fronts. Daring justice is the call to be found together in faith and to respond together in faith—not fear. So, let us be daring as we glimpse God’s vision for a world transformed, trusting that the God we know so well, whose ways we seek to follow, will not forsake or forget us but will dare us to leave our fears behind to be in the world as people of deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice.

### Epistle Lesson

1 Corinthians 12:1‒11

### Offering

### Prayers of the People

### Lord’s Prayer

### Hymn

“I Feel the Winds of God Today” (VU 625)

### Blessing

Let us go forth and live as the call to the church invites us to do, as people
whose deep spirituality draws them ever closer to God, the eternal,
whose bold discipleship reflects their life as followers of Jesus Christ,
and whose commitment to daring justice is a sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power of transformation.
Amen.