# We Offer Gratitude through Food

# Mission and Service Thanksgiving Worship 2024

## Prelude

## Welcome

God be with you,  
**and also with you.**Let us greet one another in the name of the triune God:  
**Source of Life, Gift of Love, Teacher of Wisdom.**

## Acknowledging the Traditional Territory

Long before those of us who are settlers and those who are descendants of settlers came to this land to live, there were people here. We acknowledge that many Nations of Indigenous Peoples have lived on the land. We give thanks to this land, the territory of the (*name(s) of the Indigenous People(s) whose territory you are in*) and commit to the stewardship of this land.

## Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light this candle as a symbolic action to recognize God’s presence.  
**In every moment, especially the moment of sharing food, Christ’s light shines. Alleluia!**

## Opening Hymn

“All Who Hunger” (*Voices United* 60)

## Opening Prayer

Taste and see that God is good.  
God of abundance,  
**we give you thanks for your goodness.**May all people, every day, be fed with nutritious food in body and soul.  
**Help us share food as we share good news of your abundant love.  
Amen.**

## Prayer of Confession

Generous God,  
From sowing to harvest, you are there.   
You have invited us to be farmers, tending to the fields, and tending to each other.   
And yet we too often ignore your invitation and think only of ourselves.   
If we look in our cupboards, and they are full, we assume our blessings are for us alone.   
We prepare meal after meal for ourselves, forgetting your invitation to tend to others.

Or perhaps we look in our cupboards and find less.   
Things feel scarce and we find ourselves turning inward, letting anxiety mount, feeding on fear, navel gazing, or scrolling social media as a balm for our dissatisfaction.   
We know this is not your hope for us.   
We ask for your forgiveness.   
We are grateful for this opportunity to pray, confess to our small-thinking, and remember the fields and neighbours you have invited us to tend.   
We pray this as people on the Way of Jesus.   
Amen.

## Words of Assurance

All are invited to God’s banquet, where we will be fed and feed each other. God wants abundant life and love for all.

**Merciful God,**   
**like a farmer waiting for seeds to sprout, you are endlessly patient with us. Guide us as we turn away from scarcity and fear, towards actions that feed ourselves and others. We give thanks for your love and all the ways you fill our lives. Amen.**

## Invitation Hymn to Children’s Time

“If Our God Had Simply Saved Us” (*VU* 131) (vs. 1, 2, 3, 10)

## Children’s Time: The Miracle of Food

*(Here are a few ideas to consider what may work best in your context. Each lifts up the loaves and fishes story, which is the Gospel reading.)*

1. Adult leader is eating snacks (something tasty, abundant, and also easy to share). They aren’t sharing though. The leader can start telling the story of Jesus out, and the disciples pointing out that the crowd is bound to get hungry. Say things, “Like me! I am so hungry this morning. I am really glad I found these grapes/crackers/candies in the kitchen. I would be starving otherwise. Anyway, Jesus tells the disciples to feed everyone, but they were like, “who me?! We only have five loaves of bread and two fish and there are 5,000 people out there.” But Jesus took the food, blessed it (meaning he said thanks to God for it), and gave it to the disciples to share. Can you guess what happened?”

Have the children or congregation give some answers and follow their lead.

Let everyone know that in the end, everyone was fed and there were even leftovers. Ask, “How do you think that is possible?” Leave space and affirm children’s answers.

Hopefully someone mentions sharing—even better if they call the leader out for not sharing.

“I suppose I could share some of my grapes/crackers/candy, but I am worried there won’t be enough for me if I give some away. What do you folks think?” Hopefully the kids will insist on sharing. Take a moment to express gratitude for the food (little Grace) and have the kids share with each other, and the congregation (if that works in your context).

2. If you have someone in the congregation who loves to “act” or be a bit silly, start the conversation much the same way as above with some food present. In this scenario you can start with sharing with the kids as you tell the loaves and fishes story. Near the end, have your adult helper come in, complaining of how hungry they are. Except their arms are stuck straight (maybe wrapping paper tubes, or just “bad arthritis so they can’t bend at the elbows”). They can ham-up how they haven’t been able to eat for soooo long because they can’t reach their mouth. They can take the grapes/crackers/candy and demonstrate, having it fall to the floor with much sadness.

Ask the kids if they have any ideas on how to help this very hungry person. Ideally, they will figure out that *they* need to feed this person. Then have a conversation about how we need to share and also care for each other.

3. This works best if you have a smaller number of kids. Have a piece of cake, or a nice roll of bread, along with a knife. “I am so excited to eat this piece of cake! It is going to be so good.”

Notice the children, or someone watching and ask...maybe hesitantly, “Jenny, did you want some cake?” Assuming they say yes, “Ok! Good. You are going to love this. It is [name a way it is special]” then cut the food into a smaller piece.

Then notice another person, and ask if they want some, and another, and another...each time feeling hesitant, but then excited to share, pumping up how special this food is, and how you want more people to know about it. Keep cutting the food until it makes sense and then share the pieces with folks (maybe you’ve invited them up front). Hopefully everyone eats it and loves it.

You can then talk about how this is like giving in general. You may hesitate, but actually it feels good to share something—like money, or time, or a special toy—with others.

In all instances, share the Mission and Service Story and talk about how your congregation shares—along with churches all over Canada—to make some pretty excellent things happen.

## Children’s Program

(*See* Food and the Power of Sharing at the end of this document. *Children may leave for the children’s program if it is not an intergenerational service*.)

## Scripture

Isaiah 25:6–9, Matthew 14:13–21

## Sung Prayer of Illumination

“My Soul Is Thirsting for You” (*VU* p. 781)

## Sermon

*(Full text of the sermon,* You Feed Them*, is available on the United Church website, in the Mission and Service in Worship section.)*

Response Hymn

“For the Crowd of Thousands” (*VU* 355)

## Offering Invitation

If you were hungry, what meal would you love to eat? If you could make any meal for those you loved, what would you serve? Jesus says to us, “*You* give them something to eat.” Knowing the gift it is to be fed when we are hungry, we gratefully give our offerings for Mission and Service and local ministries so that all of us and our neighbours would be fed and know God’s abundant love.

## Offering Dedication

God who works alongside us in the fields, who delights in the smells of our kitchens, who laughs with us at table, and encourages another piece of pie, we thank you for all the ways you feed us through food and through community. Transform our gifts and offerings—those in this plate, those given online or through PAR, and those we give throughout the week—so that your children near and far might taste and see your goodness. In the name of the One who breaks the bread, we pray, Amen.

## Prayers of the People

Trusting that God receives all our prayers and responds to each of them in love, let us pray together saying: Gracious God, hear our prayer; and in your love answer.

God of grace and love, today we gather as a community of faith to feel your presence in a tangible way and to offer you thanks and praise. We offer our gratitude now for the necessities of life—for food for our tables, shelter and protection from the elements, and health and strength. We also say thank you for those other blessings that make our lives meaningful—for family and friends who share our lives and our daily bread, for this church community, and for your call to love, to share, and make a difference in the world. Gracious God, hear our prayer…

**And in your love answer.**

Acknowledging our gifts, we come to you also with our needs:

We pray for the world you love:

That the seeds of power be sown fairly, and your bread shared widely,  
that world leaders and governments rule justly and wisely and care for the basic needs of all people.

Gracious God, hear our prayer…

**And in your love answer.**

We pray for this town, for safety, security, and well-being.

Gracious God, hear our prayer…

**And in your love answer.**

We pray for this community of faith, those in-person and those online, and for your Church throughout the world. Touched by your Spirit, may we proclaim your good news, grow in faith as disciples, and intentionally live our faith and make a difference in the lives of others, in your name.

Gracious God, hear our prayer…

**And in your love answer.**

We pray, O God, for all of those in need of your grace this day:

We pray for healing for the sick and peace for those who mourn.  
We pray for those who do not have the support of others.  
We pray for justice for all people, and especially those without food security, or housing and for those of us who are ostracized, discriminated against, and treated unjustly.

Gracious God, hear our prayer…

**And in your love answer.**

And now, as a community of faith, we pray the prayer Jesus taught us.

## The Lord’s Prayer

## Commissioning Song

“As We Gather at Your Table” (*VU* 457)

## Sung Benediction

“God Bless to Us Our Bread” (Spanish and English) (*MV* 193)

## Worship Follow-Up Activities

* Research poverty issues that affect your community (concerning children, youth at risk, the elderly, single parents, people with disabilities).
* Learn about food waste at home, at school, at hospital, and work places, locally and globally.
* Learn about food sovereignty, growing food locally, and consuming local food.
* These learning events could be fundraising events, e.g., selling food, locally produced and prepared.
* Think about fundraising opportunities using food as a teaser, e.g., donation invitations for kitchen improvements, replacing or fixing cooking-related materials.
* Invite someone new or lonely to a meal at your home.
* Practice meal sharing (more than communion), which can be a regular part of the church life, one of the most powerful ways to offer gratitude.

## Children’s Program: Food and the Power of Sharing

### Preparation

Teachers and a volunteer (who is good at storytelling) prepare rice crackers and bowls (one bowl per child). A bread machine is prepared and turned on ahead of time to create the smell of baking bread as the children enter the children’s room. The idea is to evoke the sense of food.

### Opening

Welcome the children and check in, asking each child about their week. Introduce new friends. Then offer a prayer, such as:

Let us give thanks to God before we begin our learning today.  
God of food, thank you for feeding us each day with daily food.  
Help us learn about offering through sharing food and sharing stories.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

### Introduction to Activity

Ask the children: Do you smell something? Do you feel hungry? *(Pause and engage with the children’s responses.)*

### Engaging Activity

Today, the children will explore the story of the five loaves and two fishes (Mark 6:30–44).

Everyone sits on a chair in a circle. First a teacher or volunteer reads the story. Since it is a well-known story, some of the children may have heard it already and have formed pictures inside their heads.

Next, the children are invited to tell the story by themselves. They tell the story in a kind of relay format with each child composing a sentence for the story and the next piggy-backing their sentence onto the one before. As each child has a turn, the story unfolds. Teachers should not be too worried about accuracy. Allow the children to use their imaginations and the freedom to remember the story as they wish. For example, one can begin with the sentence “One day, Jesus and his disciples went to a boat.” “They got in the boat and the boat felt a bit wobbly.” “They paddled; it was hard work.” “When they arrived at the other side, people were waiting for them.” “They told Jesus to teach them.” “So he did.” “Jesus taught many things for many hours.” “They all became tired and hungry.” “Jesus told disciples to feed them.” “Disciples knew that they only had two fishes and five loaves.” “As they shared the food, it never ran out; there was a lot left over.” “The miracle happened.”

It is hard to predict what the end of the children’s story might be. The story may take unexpected twists and turns. It may even end differently from the story in the Bible. This is okay—there is no wrong ending. Teachers must learn to trust the Spirit.

The teacher might try to direct the story with questions, but should not control it. The teacher might also want to explore the story by asking questions about things that are not in the Bible story such as, “What was the weather like when they got in the boat?” or “What were people doing on the shore while the waited for Jesus?” When the storytelling is done, teachers can ask, “What was different in our story compared with the one that was read?” “Did you learn anything new?” “Was it fun to tell the story in this way?”

Teachers can go further by reflecting: “This storytelling is an example of the power of sharing. By sharing the story together, instead of one person controlling the story with all of the knowledge, the story becomes fuller and more enriching. Sharing a story is like sharing food. Everyone has something to eat, and we all eat well and feel full by sharing.”

### Rice Cracker Sharing Game

* There are four children.
* Three children are given four rice crackers in a bowl, but one child is given only two crackers.
* The first three children give one cracker to the one who received only two. The one who had the least now has the most (five crackers, the rest have three crackers).
* Perhaps, that is what happened in the story in Mark. People were so grateful that they all offered to each other. At the end, they were left with abundant food and an abundant feeling of gratitude.

### Closing

End with the Lord’s Prayer, inviting children to raise their voices when reciting the line, “Give us this day our daily bread.”