# Northern Lights

## A Centennial Worship Service for the Wider Church The United Church of Canada

## Notes for Animating the Service

We have envisioned using the imagery of the Northern Lights as a representation of the Holy Spirit. This imagery connects us to the local context where we live and work and have our being, and it also moves away from images of fire at Pentecost, an image that is becoming increasingly triggering and traumatic for people as we live in the midst of climate crises and destructive fires.

We encourage you to use streamers, ribbons, or cloth of various colours throughout the service as a visual way to represent the Northern Lights in your worship space. Specifically, we invite you to use colours beyond the traditional Pentecost reds and oranges to move away from fire imagery, and present more of a “Northern Lights” vibe through using blues, purples, pinks, and/or greens.

If you are using long banners of cloth, consider draping these cloths on the communion table, flowing down towards/throughout the congregation (also consider safety and movement in your space to do this!). You might also drape long, colourful cloths from the ceiling as ways to symbolize the Northern Lights.

You may also wish to have projections of Northern Lights (either imagery on a screen, or using Christmas light projectors to have moving lights on your ceiling, or some other part of the worship space).

Lastly, if you have the possibility to work with liturgical dancers to further animate this service through dancing with streamers or fabric, we encourage you to do so!

Other ideas of “Spirit” imagery:

* [Fireworks Bubble Machine](https://toyscentral.ca/products/fireworks-bubble-machine-automatic-bubble-blower-maker-toys-with-music-and-light-outdoor-blowing-bubbles-toy-for-adults-kids-birthday-party-b-20-holes?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIqbH51aPxiwMVmjcIBR0ddRi7EAQYAiABEgLuOfD_BwE) like this
* [This idea](https://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.com/2012/11/year-c-baptism-of-lord-january-13-2013.html) of creating a curtain of streamers over a doorway to envision the Spirit hovering above us
* [No Mess Confetti Crackers](https://www.michaels.com/product/24-pack-throw-streamers-no-mess-confetti-paper-shakers-poppers-for-party-celebrations-multicolor-231999948890669068) like these
* making windsocks with fabric streamers to place outside so the Spirit prayers can blow (like prayer flags); before the service: hand out streamers or ribbons or thin pieces of fabric to the congregation so that everyone has a streamer/ribbon

## Prelude

### Land Acknowledgment

(We encourage you to offer a land acknowledgment that is fitting for the peoples and territory in which you minister)

### Call to the Church

Acts 2:14–18, paraphrased

(This is envisioned as one voice offering a loud and dramatic proclamation from the back of the worship space before the Opening Procession takes place.)

One: Then Peter stood up with the other disciples, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:  
 “Beloved Ones of God! In the last days, God says:  
‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your children will prophesy,  
your elders will dream dreams,  
and your youth will see visions.On my servants, people of all genders and races,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days!”

### Opening Procession

Possible procession of symbols: communion table decorations of long fabric or streamers, cross, communion elements, twirlers. This could be done with the minister and a choir, or with liturgical dancers, or lay members of the congregation. Alternatively, communion elements can come forward with the offering during A New Creed later in the service.

During the procession, musician(s) should have a growing soundtrack…quiet at first, then louder… a song that speaks to awe and grandeur. Flourish to finish. Dancers get people to stand up…

### Call to Worship

(The Call to Worship to follow directly after with the last person in procession leading and embodying these spoken words with the same uplifting, energetic sense as the Procession. Have someone lead the People’s responses to model a similar energy.)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place…  
Today, we gather in many places and ways, yet we are one in heart!   
Touched by the Spirit, the first disciples were enlivened.   
 **By the Spirit, we live and thrive!**   
On the day of Pentecost, the Church was born.   
 **Today, we celebrate 100 years of being the United Church!**   
In their gathering that day, people were changed by the Spirit.   
 **In our gathering today, we seek the Spirit’s direction for tomorrow.**   
With open hearts, let us worship God and pray for the Spirit’s presence amongst us.  
 **Come, Holy Spirit, Come!**

### Opening Prayer

(As based on the original Opening Prayer of the Inaugural worship service of The United Church of Canada)

Awesome God,

on Pentecost, you gave the gift of the Holy Spirit

to an expectant and united church.

And by your Spirit, you bring us to this time and place

to lift our hearts, minds, and bodies to worship you.

Grant us the hope of the same Spirit

in our life and worship.

Help us to expect great things from you,

and attempt great things *for* you!

We are diverse in many ways, but our hearts are one in you.

May we show the world

the love we experience in Jesus,

and the power we find in the Spirit

as we seek to honour your dream.

To your glory be our worship and witness. Amen.

### Opening Hymn suggestions

VU 651 Guide Me O Thou Great and Holy

VU 380 She Flies On

### Words of Welcome

On June 10th, 1925, the inaugural service of the United Church of Canada was held. Today, we join with others across the church to give thanks, mark and witness to the church that we are and the church that we are becoming by the grace of the Spirit.

(Please acknowledge and give thanks to local guests and community partners who have come to help mark the Centennial.)

### Prayer of Confession

(If you have displayed long streams of fabric or streamers on a table at the front, the fabric/streamers can be pulled back as the prayer of confession continues. They are drawn in and squished down to nothing. Then when the Words of Assurance is said, they are pulled out to full length again.)

(If you have liturgical dancers for this service, you might ask them to choreograph a dance to this Prayer of Confession and Words of Assurance using long streamers to imagine the ways in which we twist, contort, and dampen the Good News. Then during Words of Assurance include movements that demonstrate the grace and abundance of the Spirit with us, with joyful large movements. If using paper streamers, the dancer can receive new and larger streamers -maybe from the person saying the prayer of confession- as paper streamers do not uncrumple well)

### Introduction to the Prayer of Confession

One: The act of Confession is a way that we admit to dampening the movement of the Spirit in our lives and the world. We invite you to roll up your streamer and hold it in your hand during the Prayer of Confession as we reflect on the ways that we limit the movement of the Spirit.

One: Gracious God,

Time and again, you send us the gift of your Spirit.

Time and again, you send us the gift of your dreams.

Time and again, you love us back into being.

And time and again, we turn away from you.

Gracious God, forgive us

for all the times we have twisted or forgotten your Good News,

for all the times in which we have confused unity with “sameness”,

for all the times we have failed to let your Kingdom (*or Beloved Community*) inspire our living,

We are sorry.

For the times we have tried to be the church without you,

for the times we have doubted your presence and power to work in us,

for the times we have believed the lie that there is not enough and we are not enough,

forgive us.

Take all the ways that we have fallen into hubris and fear,

missing the mark as individuals and as a denomination,

and in your mercy, help us to move into the future you have for us.

Open our hearts, God.

May your Spirit ignite your dream in us again!

This we pray in Christ’s holy and powerful name. Amen.

### Words of Assurance

(In the words of assurance, we remember God’s mercy and grace that allows us to begin again. You are invited to receive this truth by unrolling your streamers during the assurance)

Dear Ones of God, receive these words and take heart:

God poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost,

healing hearts and divisions,

empowering the church to move forward in Christ’s spirit.

And God continues to pour out the Holy Spirit on us today.

So, let us rejoice in God’s love and forgiveness,

And share this blessing with all those we meet,

for we are forgiven, and we are blessed to be a blessing.

All: Thanks be to God! *(waving streamers)*

Amen.

### Hymn suggestions

Little by Little (*Then Let Us Sing!*)

Halle Halle Halle VU 958

MV 122 This is the Day

Trust these words (*Then Let Us Sing!*)

### Time For All Ages

This past year there have been exquisite moments in the sky: the solar eclipse, comets, and then the spectacular aurora borealis (northern lights). Have you ever seen the Northern lights?

The northern lights remind me of the Holy Spirit, the way they move freely across the sky, the awe they inspire, and the way they are very real yet also mysterious.

With our streamers, we can together make it look like the northern lights are here in this sanctuary. (Demonstrate how to wave the streamers, commenting about how they sometimes look like they are moving like a wave, up and down, side to side and in a circle. Invite the congregation to try out each of these movements with you.)

But the thing about the Holy Spirit is that it is not just out there in the sky somewhere.

God lives in us by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that helps us understand God and God’s will for us. The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom as we read the bible, fresh ways to experience the world as God does, and courage when our faith calls us out into the world. The Holy Spirit helps us to move in new ways, God’s ways.

Here is a catchy song that can help us remember that the Holy Spirit is always with us and at work. It is found in More Voices 156 and goes like this…

(Share the words of the hymn with the children/people gathered first just by saying them.)

We are meant to move with this song, so as we sing, let’s all move as the Spirit calls us. And if you want to make that spirit in you visible, you can also use your ribbon/streamer to dance with.

(If kids are coming forward, make sure you have some streamers in case they forgot them in the pew and encourage them to dance in and around the isles remember ribbons are for adults too, not just children.)

Let’s dance with the Spirit.

(Play Dance with the Spirit MV 156 repeating at least 3 times.)

Wow! That was amazing spirit energy! Let us pray:

Holy God,

Thank you for making yourself known to us through the Holy Spirit.

Continue to dance with us, today and every day,

So that we might be filled with your joy, your courage and your wisdom.

Amen.

### Prayer of Illumination

Spirit of God, you hovered over the waters before the first days of Creation,

and you hovered over the disciples on the first day that Christ’s church came alive.

You were present to our ancestors in faith 100 years ago as they came together to form The United Church of Canada,

You were present in all those who continued to build a uniting church in the generations that followed,

and we believe that you are still present with us today.

Open our hearts to you in this time so that

we might know your wisdom,

trust in the ways you proclaim,

and live into them with hope!

All this we pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

### Scripture

Ephesians 1:15–19, 3:16-21

(We recommend using multiple readers for this reading)

**Voice One**: I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

**Voice Two**: I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us who believe, according to the working of God’s great power.

**Voice One**: I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

**Voice Two**: Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Anthem

Not the Building But the People (Daw and Lim)  
([hopepublishing.com/Images/HymnodyPDF/HM9208.52.pdf](https://www.hopepublishing.com/Images/HymnodyPDF/HM9208.52.pdf))

### Sermon

(See separate document for Sermon fodder.)

### Invitation to Offering

We have witnessed the fruits of God’s Spirit, in the faithful ancestors who came before us building the church, in the humble acknowledgement of wrongs and the seeking of reconciliation, and in the works done for justice. We have witnessed God’s blessings, in communities gathered sharing love and grace and in resources shared for the flourishing of all. With thanksgiving and joy, we present our offerings this day for what has been and what will come.

### Solo suggestion during the Offering

There’s a Wild Hope in the Wind (*Then Let Us Sing!*)

A New Creed

(If elements have not been brought forward earlier, they would come forward with the offering as the New Creed is recited.)

Doxology

### Prayer of Dedication

All: **Empowering God,**

**we believe your Spirit is with us this day, leading us into a new future.**

**We offer our time, talents, finances, and hopes,**

**trusting you to do more than we can dream possible.**

**Bless us and these offerings with your Spirit.**

**May we be bold disciples,**

**deeply connected to you,**

**who dare to act for justice.**

**This we pray, in Jesus’ name.**

**Amen**.

### Sacrament of Communion

Invitation: On Pentecost, the gift of God’s Spirit was given freely to all who longed to receive it. On this day of Pentecost, we welcome all those who long to follow in the Way of Jesus to share in this sacrament of Communion.

One: God is with us.

All: **We are not alone.**

One: Christ is present here.

All: **The Spirit is among us!**

One: Let us give thanks to God

All: **in memory and in hope.**

Great Thanksgiving:

Blessed are you, Gracious God,

for you grace this world with life and light and love.

In the beginning, your Spirit moved across the deep waters

like the Northern Lights dance across the skies at night.

Amid emptiness and chaos, you sought connection,

And so, you created day and night,

Skies and seas, plants and trees

the stars in the sky,

the animals that fly and the animals that swim,

the animals that walk and swing and sing,

And you called us all *good.*

And over time, your Spirit continued to call forth wisdom and courage for your people:

Filled with the Spirit, Miriam danced for joy on the shores of the Red Sea

To Elijah, the Spirit was heard in the still, small voice after the fire and wind.

Ezekiel witnessed your Spirit breathe life into a people without hope.

To the prophet Joel, you promised:

“I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your children will prophesy,

your elders will dream dreams,

your youth will see visions.

And on my servants, people of all genders and races,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

Yet we turned from you,

Afraid and uncertain of what you would do.

Yet you continued to pursue us in love,

coming to Mary who boldly said yes

and so, you brought that Spirit into the world once more,

alive and embodied in Jesus, the Christ.

He lived with the Spirit’s deep passion and wisdom.

He boldly shared the Spirit’s joy and compassion.

He dared to dream that your kingdom *(or kin-dom)* will come on earth,

as it is in heaven,

and he called us all to follow in his Way.

And, on Pentecost, his followers received your Spirit, too.

They proclaimed your goodness in every language, saying:

Sanctus (possibly said in many languages—or song using a communion set)

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord,

God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory,

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest!

One: Living in the Spirit’s ways drew attention,

both from those who sought to follow and those who were afraid.

And so, we remember the courage and vision Jesus shared with his friends

on the night he was betrayed.

During supper, Jesus took a loaf of bread, gave thanks to God,

broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

“Take this bread and eat.

This is my body which is given for you.

Whenever you eat, do this in remembrance of me.”

And after supper, he took the cup of blessing,

He gave thanks to God, and shared it with his disciples, saying:

“Take this cup and drink.

This cup is God’s promise, shared in my life.

Whenever you drink it, remember me.”

Loving God, we rejoice in the life of Jesus Christ,

and in the gift of your Spirit that is poured out upon us.

We now open ourselves to your power and presence

so that our lives may proclaim the mystery of our faith:

Memorial Acclamation

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again!

Epiclesis

(First line said in many languages, perhaps one after another, overlapping.)

Pour out your Spirit once more upon us, O God,

and upon these gifts of bread and cup

so that we might witness your Spirit in action

and join in Christ’s life,

proclaiming your joy and your Kingdom.

On this Pentecost day, we pray:

Come, Holy Spirit!

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Amen**!

The Lord’s Prayer

(Shared in the many languages, the languages of our hearts.)

(Communion is shared)

Hymn(s)

(Depending on how you share communion, songs could be offered as anthems/Ministries of Music, or there could be congregational singing. We offer some suggestions below, but please choose music that fits your context best)

VU 625 I Feel the Winds of God today

For Everyone Born (*Then Let us Sing!* and Celebration Package)

Living Bread (*Then Let Us Sing!*)

Build a Longer Table (*Then Let Us Sing!*)

### Prayer after Communion

All: **In your grace and by your Spirit we have been fed at this table,**

**brought into communion with you and each other.**

**May this banquet so inspire us**

**to love as we have been loved,**

**feed as we have been fed,**

**and to welcome all as Christ has welcomed us.**

**In this way, we will witness your reign on earth, as it is in heaven.**

**Amen.**

### Prayer for the Church

(If possible, this should be from the center of the center aisle. The Christ candle is processed into the middle of the congregation, the congregation is invited to turn towards the light so that the Christ Candle is in the “center” of the congregation.

This prayer can be led by three different voices, possibly each helping to hold the Christ Candle, or the voices could be read “chorally” from three different parts of the congregation, or you could reconfigure the prayer to be a responsive prayer.)

**Voice One**: Holy One,

We are your church, your people gathered.

Since the beginning, you have been with us.

In the dry and desert-like moments,

when decline and death surround us,

you teach us that we need you and to trust in you.

When these truths have been remembered, your people have flourished.

**Voice Two**: We have been together as The United Church of Canada for 100 years.

On this historic threshold, we remember yet again

that we live and move and have our being in *you*.

It is time to dance with the Holy Spirit as we move past this moment.

(Dancers model twirling of streamers, encourage people to follow suit.)

**Voice Three**: Empower us loving God,

to live by your Spirit,

unafraid of where She is taking us.

Now is the time to dig deep in our faith!

To dare to be your resurrection people, for Christ’s Way is our way.

Let us be alive by your Spirit’s power!

Awaken us to your moving among us even now

so we can boldly follow your call into tomorrow.

### Sung Amen

MV 219 Ameni

MV 205 Great Amen

MV 208 Great Amen

Great Amen (Celebration Package)

(The Christ candle is processed out of the worship space as the Amen is being sung. Model at this time streamers waving, so that we remember we are going forward in the Spirit.)

### Blessing and Sending Forth

One: Beloved, as you go out into the world this year, hold this blessing on your heart:

God who created you has chosen you for hope.

So, may the Word of Life dance in you like the lights in the northern sky.

May the power of the Spirit awaken your heart with awe,

And may your witness awaken the world in which you live.

May we travel together, listen together, love together, and grow together in the life of Christ,

as the Body of Christ.

For we are called to life–

To live a Deep Spirituality,

a Bold Discipleship,

and a Daring Justice in Christ’s name, through whom all things are possible.

(During this part, dancers begin to twirl streamers again in motions indicating praise and joy.)

All: **Praise be to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine!**

**Glory be to God, in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, from generation to generation.**

**Amen!**

### Organ Postlude

(Strong organ Postlude to begin as soon as we say the Amen. Recessional of the congregation, possibly led by dancers.)

*Rev. Penny Nelson and Rev. Michelle Armstrong have been friends for over 20 years since they first met at a youth ministry event in Alberta Northwest Conference! They both studied at the Atlantic School of Theology and became ordained ministers in The United Church of Canada in 2013. They have created retreats and worship services together many times over the past 12 years.*

*Rev. Penny is currently serving Avon United Church in Hantsport, NS in an experimental growth ministry. As a Metis woman originally from a farm near Camrose, Alberta and was nurtured in her faith by her home congregation of Camrose United. She now lives in Wolfville, NS with her wife and their beloved calico cat.*

*Rev. Michelle is currently serving in the ecumenical shared ministry of St. Paul’s United Church and St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Fredericton, NB. Michelle’s roots with the United Church began in her twenties through campus ministries at the University of Calgary, and her love of God has taken her across the country to minister in Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick. She lives with her husband and two children in Fredericton.*