

## E-3 Milestone Worship Service Outlines and Resources

**Background:** In 2018 Mennonite Church Alberta embarked on “Vision 2020”, a visioning process led by Betty Pries exploring God’s calling to us as individuals, congregations, and the MCA faith family. This led to the E3 Action Plan, “Encountering, Embracing, Embodying Christ in life, in community, in the world”.

While our E3 action plan has run its course, the journey continues. In E3 we have a milepost as we journey together in Christ into the future God has in mind for us. We know that people engaged with these E3 themes to different degrees, and in different ways. What have we learned or noticed in the E3 process? What do we take forward with us as we continue to strive to encounter, embrace, and embody Christ in all that we do?

We encourage congregations to set aside time to mark this time of transition. This service gives a format for reflecting on the past 3-4 years, and allow this shared experience as followers of Christ to continue to shape our identity as individuals, congregations, and as the broader Mennonite church.

**Preparation:** Take some time to review the last 3-4 years from your own experience. If you need some refreshers you can read through the [brochure](#) that was distributed at the March MCAB Annual Delegates Sessions (feel free to read/use any part of that in your worship service) or re-read the resources put together for each year of E3 (<https://mcab.ca/e3-mca>).

The following are suggestions you can use in creating your own worship service. Again, feel free to pull any of the earlier prepared resources from years 1-3.

### **Call to worship** (encounter):

L: Come into God’s presence today.

P: We come to worship the God of love and grace.

L: Come into God’s presence today.

P: We come, seeking to know God.

L: Come into God’s presence today.

P: We come to hear God speak into our lives.

All: O, God, we come into Your presence today. Reveal Yourself. Open our hearts to hear Your message. Amen.

### **Prayer:**

Our life-giving Creator God,  
we pray today,

knowing we are Your created, Your children, Your beloved.

There is no greater love we can conceive of.

You are with us always.

While You are all-goodness, all-wisdom, all-power and all-love,  
You still choose to walk with us and hold us close.

We stop this moment,  
    just to try to take in all that You are  
        and all that You have done  
            —and ask You to reveal Yourself to us in unforgettable encounters.

When we truly begin to glimpse the beauty and order of Your Kingdom ways,  
    how can we but not want to structure and live our lives in Your glory  
        and in Your shalom?

Present paths for us each day, we pray,  
    where we can walk in the light of Your love,  
        bringing Your hope and healing into the world around us  
            —a world longing to soak up justice, peace, love and joy.

Let us receive the wonder of who You are,  
    every minute of every day,  
        embracing Your original design  
        and share the wonder of who You are.

God, help us learn to rely on You for all our needs.  
Help us to discern what our needs actually are.  
Help us to care for others as much as You care for everyone and all creation.  
Help us put aside greed  
    and instead see through the eyes of kinship,  
        caring for one another.

As we begin to see ourselves through Your eyes,  
    may we learn to extend grace to ourselves and each other,  
        just as You have extended grace to us.  
    May it become impossible for us not to live generously and graciously  
        as we come to know You more and more,  
        and as we desire to embody Your love and faithfulness.

All this can happen because You have given us Your Spirit.  
Let us rest in Your presence  
    and allow the Spirit to move in and through us  
for Your glory and for a reconciled world.  
    Amen.

## Scriptures:

- Our identity in Christ (quotes are from The Message paraphrase of the Bible):
  - **1 Peter 2: 4-10** Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. The workmen took one look and threw it out; God set it in the place of honor. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you'll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God. The Scriptures provide precedent: Look! I'm setting a stone in Zion, a cornerstone in the place of honor. Whoever trusts in this stone as a foundation will never have cause to regret it. To you who trust him, he's a Stone to be proud of, but to those who refuse to trust him, The stone the workmen threw out is now the chief foundation stone. For the untrusting it's . . . a stone to trip over, a boulder blocking the way. They trip and fall because they refuse to obey, just as predicted. But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.
  - **Eph. 2:19-21** . You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.
  - **John 14: 9b-10** "To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, 'Where is the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren't mere words. I don't just make them up on my own. The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act."
- Any of the previous scriptures from years 1-3 that you feel could use more time
- So many more! Let the Spirit lead you!

**Song options:** How to even begin making a list? Half the hymnal has songs that are more than suitable for the various elements of the past three years. Perhaps you could center some of your thoughts around these areas as you choose songs that would fit with your congregation:

- A Christ-centered faith ( a song like "Jesus Calls Us" or just look through the "Life, Teaching and Ministry of Jesus" section of your hymnal)
- Encounter:
  - Gathering ("Summoned by the God who Love Us" or "Come Away From Rush and Hurry")
  - God's love ("The Love of God is Greater Far...")
  - Prayer ("God be the Love" or "God Speaks to Us in Bird and Song")
- Embrace

- Journey (“Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song”)
- Offerings (“There is in Every Person”)
- Community (“What is This Place” or “One is the Body”)
  - Communion (“We Place Upon Your Table”)
- Embodying
  - Healing, hope (just look through the “God’s call” or “Following Christ” sections of your hymnal)
  - Calling, ambassadorship (“Let us Build a House” or “Life Giver, Maker, God of All” or “Christ has No Body Here But Ours” or “You are Salt for the Earth”)
- Blessing/vision (“There’s a Wild Hope in the Wind” or “Go, My Children”)

**Children’s time ideas:**

1. What do we love the most? (gather answers). Explain that God loves us more than that, more than we can imagine. That nothing can reduce or take away God’s love for us. We can feel safe in God’s presence. God wants us to know and understand who God is. Jesus came to show us who God is and who we were meant to be. As we are filled with God’s love, acceptance and grace, we can learn to live like that too.
2. Any story that illustrates that growing starts from a small seed/step.
3. Any story that is inclusive of others or shows we can learn about God and goodness from others.
4. Any story that includes any of fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and/or self-control) and affirms that these actions and characteristics are life-giving Kingdom ways.

**Time for reflection:** Ask 3 people from your congregation to present some of their own personal experiences with E3 or with the themes that were part of these past 3-4 years. It would likely be easiest to arrange this in the 3 areas of “Life”, “Community” and the “World”. Or if you prefer: “Encounter”, “Embrace” and “Embody”. Here are some possible starter questions to get them thinking about what they’d like to share:

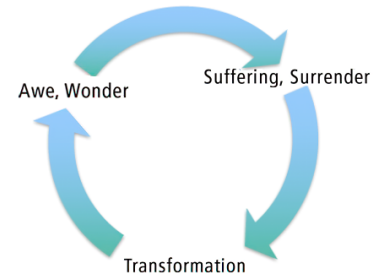
- What did you find particularly meaningful about the past 3-4 years?
- Did you have any “ah-ha” moments? Or events/timing that were more than just coincidences?
- What does Encounter/Embody/Embrace mean to you? Where/how do you, personally, foster this experience?
- Did your concept of Life/Community/World change or expand in any way?
- Has E3 shaped your identity in any way?
- Did we make progress on any of the initial goals we had?
- What do you wish you could have spent more time delving into? Will you pursue that now?
- How has this journey prepared you for the future?

### Sermon starters:

1. It is fitting that as we wind up our E3 journey, we return to the beginning and once again contemplate the “Grand Narrative Spiral” that Betty Pries introduced us to during our Vision 2020 process.

Throughout the Bible we see how God’s people experience the awe-inspiring presence of God, and inevitably move to suffering. By surrendering in trust to God, they once again open themselves to have their lives transformed through God’s presence.

As we move forward from here, we may find it helpful to reengage with this concept and the practices of E3 again and again. Regularly devoting time to the spiritual disciplines and practises we explored in year one will hopefully reap the benefits of a life, and a church, of hope. By seeking God (encounter), we will continue to fill our “love tanks” as we rediscover who God is and God’s great love for us. We will continue to grow in understanding (embrace) and to develop Christ-like character (embody).



2. The themes of the E3 action plan reflect important aspects of the life of faith to which we are called in Jesus Christ. How do we continue to Encounter, Embrace, and Embody Christ? How do these three actions manifest themselves in life, in community, and in the world? The E3 resource packages may provide inspiration: [Year One](#). [Year Two](#). [Year Three](#).
3. A second image that Betty Pries gave us during the Vision 2020 process was that of the “God-house” within us. Each of us has been created in the image of God, with the breath of God residing within us. Around the light of that core we grow layers of skin that help define us, but also serve to protect us from our limitations and vulnerabilities. These layers can obscure the light of God’s image within us. Feeling worthy, beautiful and beloved only comes from tapping into God’s presence within us-- the house of God that defines our true identity. It is hard to do that if our identity is not centred in God, but focused on these outward layers and ways that we describe ourselves. We need to work on letting go of our “attachments” (holding too tightly) to our characteristics and live into our God-given container with more trust and grace.

Have we truly come to understand our “belovedness”? This could be a good opportunity to delve a bit deeper into our understanding of our personal and corporate identities, and how spiritual practices and worship help to cut through these layers so God’s light within us shines forth.

More information about Betty’s God-house image can be found [here](#) or on pages 39-45 of the summary from [Betty Pries](#). The following prayer may be of use during your time of worship:

- a. Acceptance Prayer:
  - i. I allow myself to feel what I am feeling (because we entrench that which we resist).
  - ii. I accept my feeling as real, I do not deny these feelings (because we can't let go what we haven't accepted as real).
  - iii. I release my feelings into God's care.
  - iv. I rest in God's love for me (because God love us unconditionally).
4. At our 2023 [Annual Delegate Sessions](#) Joe Heikman made three presentations on the theme of hope and transition in a time of transition. These presentations provide resonance with our Vision 2020 process and E3. His themes of dealing with the reality of our human frailty, trusting God while experiencing "The Darkness of the Tomb" and the hope we find in the "Darkness of the Womb" may provide inspiration for a wrap-up message.

### **Benediction/Closing:**

You may choose to close with the **E3 Milepost Litany** that was used at the ADS in Pincher Creek. A Leaders reads the light print while the congregation responds with the bold. It shown here as was presented—please modify it to fit your gathering:

We have gathered as a faith family from across Alberta,  
Journeying together in Christ, united to each other in God's Spirit  
**God is here among us – leading and guiding and strengthening us to be God's people.**  
We have prayed to God for guidance, For vision to see our way forward  
**And God has spoken.**  
Through times of praying, times of listening, times of sharing,  
God opened our eyes, our hearts, our minds,  
We discerned things we need to release and things we need to embrace  
**We heard God's call for us to Encounter, Embrace, and Embody Christ  
In Life, In Community, and In the World.**  
We heard a call to see and hear Christ in the faces of people we meet, the beauty of the  
world around us, the words, music and silence of worship.  
**Come Lord Jesus! Continue to encounter us in our lives, in our communities, in the  
world.**  
We were reminded to embrace our identity as beloved children and image bearers of  
God, followers and siblings of Jesus under God.  
**Come Lord Jesus! Overwhelm us with your love and your presence. Help us embrace  
being your beloved people here on earth.**  
We have sought to surrender ourselves to the work of God within us, strengthening us  
and changing us to embody Jesus' teachings, example, and love in all we do.  
**Come Lord Jesus! Shine in us and through us, so others may see you and your gracious  
love at work in us.**  
May we live as a people transformed by God, Hopeful in God's continued guidance,  
Trusting in God's continued work within us, Having faith that God will empower us to  
Encounter, embrace, and embody Christ, wherever we may go.  
**Come Lord Jesus! Walk with us. Amen**

E-3 Wrap-Up Worship Service Second Option  
Example from First Mennonite Church Edmonton  
April 16, 2023

**Call to Worship:**

Come and Worship!

Come and hear God's voice, In the words, music, and silences of worship

Come and see God's face in the faces of those around you.

**We come to Encounter Christ**

Come now, knowing you are deeply loved by a magnificent God,

Come, knowing God is calling you,

Come,

**We come, Embracing God's presence in and among us,  
and our identity as God's beloved children.**

Come now to share Christ's message of healing and hope,

In our daily lives,

Within our community of faith,

And wherever we may go.

**We come, seeking to embody Christ's teachings and love**

Come now to worship.

Called to open your eyes to God's presence,

your ears to God's message,

and your heart to God's work within you.

Hymn: VT God is here among us VT 62

Welcome/Land Acknowledgement

Children's Feature:

[Head, Body, Legs - a story from Liberia \(by Won-Ldy Paye and Margaret H. Lippert\)](#) (We are better together as the body of Christ)

[The Day the Crayons Quit](#) (We need to work together – each one is special in its own way and has his/her own call and together we can make great things happen)

[What is God Like by Rachel Held Evans and Matthew Paul Turner](#) (Embracing that God is what makes you feel safe, what makes you feel brave, what makes you feel loved for that is what God is like)

**Encountering**

John 20: 19 – 23

Reflection (How did the disciples' encounter change them?)

[Open my eyes Lord \(VT 732\)](#)

## **Embracing**

John 20:24 – 29

Reflection (What did Thomas need to release? How did his embrace of Jesus' resurrection change him?)

[Nothing is Lost vt 653](#)

(Or [What Wondrous Love is This \(VT 564\)](#))

## **Embodying**

John 20: 30-31

Reflection

[God has no body on earth but ours VT 568](#)

Reading/prayer VT 876

Sending :

May we live as a people transformed by God,  
Hopeful in God's continued guidance,  
Trusting in God's continued work within us,  
Having faith that God will empower us  
to Encounter, Embrace, and Embody Christ,  
wherever we may go.