

## Encountering, Embracing, Embodying Christ...in Life

### Worship Service Outline

#### Words of Welcome and Introduction of Theme:

As a result of the Vision 2020 process of discernment and renewal, we as the congregations and individuals of MCA have embarked on a 3-year action plan called, "Encountering, Embracing Embodying Christ...In Life, in Community, in the World."

Today congregations across MCA are devoting their worship to a time of mutual commitment and celebration of Year 1 of this action plan. How might we as individuals and congregations open ourselves to more fully "Encounter, Embrace, Embody Christ" in Life? How might we celebrate Christ's ongoing presence and our mutual calling to connect more closely to Christ as individuals, as congregations, and as a broader church family?

#### Call to Worship:

Come! God is calling us, each of us, all of us.

From north and south, east and west, God is calling us!

Will you come?

**Yes! We come to meet God, to worship the one who made us**

Come and see what God is doing among us, God's people

**Yes! We come to hear the stories of God at work**

God wants to envelope you in loving arms,

**We rejoice in God's abundant love, bringing us together though we are far apart**

#### Prayer of Invocation:

God, today we gather, your children, your church.

We know You meet us in this time of worship,

**Remind us that You are able to meet us at all times in all places, every minute of every day.**

Today we come with humble hearts, ready to hear and see You.

**Reveal Yourself to us, be real to us, soften our hearts, open our eyes.**

We come in gratitude for Your faithfulness and Your unending love.

**Thank you for presence in our lives and in our world,**

**for the beauty You bring,**

**the joy You bestow,**

**the comfort You give,**

**the shalom You designed.**

Today we gather, Your children, Your church: ready to encounter, embrace and embody You.

Amen

<b>Hymn:</b> Jesus calls us here to meet Him	STJ #3
Come and see	HWB #20
Will you come and follow me	STS #39
We will follow	STS #40
Calm me, Lord	STS #45
This is a day of new beginnings	HWB #640

### Scripture Readings:

#### **Mark 10:46-52--Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus** (*Contemporary English Version*)

<sup>46</sup> Jesus and his disciples went to Jericho. And as they were leaving, they were followed by a large crowd. A blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was sitting beside the road. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus from Nazareth, he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David,<sup>[a]</sup> have pity on me!" <sup>48</sup> Many people told the man to stop, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, have pity on me!"

<sup>49</sup> Jesus stopped and said, "Call him over!"

They called out to the blind man and said, "Don't be afraid! Come on! He is calling for you." <sup>50</sup> The man threw off his coat as he jumped up and ran to Jesus.

<sup>51</sup> Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man answered, "Master,<sup>[b]</sup> I want to see!"

<sup>52</sup> Jesus told him, "You may go. Your eyes are healed because of your faith."

Right away the man could see, and he went down the road with Jesus.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:16-24:** 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

### Children's Feature ideas:

- Build off the commitment visual by talking about the image of a tree – how the tree needs deep roots to receive the water and nutrients to grow, (spiritual disciplines), a solid trunk to hold the weight of the branches, (the broader church), branches to reach out, give shade, provide something to grow from (congregations), leaves to receive sunshine and fruit for those around (the people)
- A story about calling for something needed even when others say to be quiet? Maybe a child making a difference by calling out? Or a child giving up something precious (like a blanket) to help someone, just like Bartimaeus gave up his cloak when he left to follow Jesus.
- Use the book "Thirty Bucks" by Donita Wiebe-Neufeld about Mr. Hermit encountering and embracing a stray cat. Through this experience Mr. Hermit comes to embody a new way of being. To order contact Donita at [donitawrites@gmail.com](mailto:donitawrites@gmail.com). More info about the book can be found at [books.friesenpress.com/store/title/119734000016510680/Donita-Wiebe-Neufeld-Thirty-Bucks](http://books.friesenpress.com/store/title/119734000016510680/Donita-Wiebe-Neufeld-Thirty-Bucks).

<b>Hymn:</b> Holy Spirit, come with power	HWB #26
Open my eyes, that I might see	HWB #517
Open my ears	STS #5
Be thou my vision	HWB #545
I heard the voice of Jesus say	HWB #493

**Sermon Starters:**

**Option 1:** The story of blind Bartimaeus can work well to explore the themes of encounter, embrace and embody. First, Bartimaeus encounters Jesus outside of Jericho, and calls out to him. Second, Bartimaeus embraces Jesus when he responds positively to the words of the crowd, "Take heart, get up, he is calling you," and goes to him. That same invitation--take heart, get up, he is calling you--confronts us. Will we embrace it? Bartimaeus' embrace of Jesus is wonderfully symbolized when he leaves behind his cloak, the garment which beggars laid on the ground to receive alms--he is ready to leave that life behind. Third, Jesus transforms Bartimaeus through this encounter and embrace. After Jesus asks the key question, "What do you want me to do for you?", a question which confronts all of us, Bartimaeus asked for sight, and Jesus healed him. This leads to Bartimaeus embodying Jesus, for immediately after he regained his sight, he followed him down the road. He was not simply healed--he became a follower of Jesus.

**Option 2:** 1 Thessalonians 5 has a strong call to nurture our relationship with God through spiritual practices. This grounds the first year of our vision in the "will of God," even as we in MCA believe that we together have discerned God's will for us in our new vision. What is old is new again! We can have confidence that God is calling us to spiritual practices, because it is affirmed in Scripture. This text ultimately grounds the Christian life, which includes spiritual practices, in God's grace, and not in our own efforts. God is the one who sanctifies and presents us blameless. God is faithful, and God will do it. This is very encouraging--spiritual disciplines become life-draining laws if we think they ultimately depend on us and our effort; they become life-giving gifts when in faith we trust that God is the one who calls us to spiritual practices, and who meets us when we practice them, and who works through them to sanctify us. In all things, including spiritual practices, we rest on God's grace, not our own strength.

**Hymn of Commitment:**

Here I am	STJ #100
Take, O take me as I am	STJ #81
We will follow	STJ #40
Have thine own way	HWB #504
If all you want Lord	HWB #512
Day by day	HWB #569
Jesus, be the center	STS #31
Renew your church	HWB #363

**MCA Visual Image and Commitment/Celebration Action (See *E3 Worship Service Background* document)**

As MCA, the visual image of the tree represents our connection to each other in Christ. Spiritual disciplines and prayer practices help grow the roots of encounter, embrace, and embodiment of Christ that nourish an ever-growing, enlarging, flourishing tree of the kingdom. As we commit to each other and to opening ourselves more

fully to God, we want to each add our leaf to the tree symbolizing our personal commitment or celebration of our experience, and how the Church of Christ is growing and giving life and beauty.

**1. Encourage people to reflect on the service and the invitation to open ourselves to encounter, embrace, and embody Christ in life.** Invite people to commit to incorporating a prayer/spiritual practice in order to express this openness to God in a new way. Note: the Personal Bucket List on the E3 Website (<https://mcab.ca/e3-mca>) provides a good list of ideas for people to consider. **People may also reflect in celebration** of ways they have already encountered, embraced, and embodied Christ in life. It may be a prayer experience, spiritual practice, or other way we are already living into this aspect of our faith.

**2. Provide people with a place to write down a few words to represent their commitment or reflection.** In keeping with the tree visual outlined for this service, our suggestion would be to use a physical “leaf” shape. These can be printed for people, or an electronic “leaf” template can be sent for people to print off on their own. It could also be an electronic response (email, zoom chat, etc.) Choose a method that works for your congregation. The goal is for everyone to have the opportunity to physically “do” something to represent their commitment to an action.

**3. Encourage people to share a few words** about their responses or reflections.

**4. Provide a way for people’s responses to be placed onto a tree display.** If your church is meeting in person, people can come forward and add their leaves to a tree display on a bulletin board. If your worship services are virtual, people could come by the church in coming days to place the leaf on the tree display themselves (see guidance in the Introductory materials). Responses could also be compiled and representative leaves added to your congregation’s tree image.

**5. Please encourage people to enter their reflections or commitment** on the [MCA form](#) . They do not have to submit their full name or contact information. How are people of MCA opening themselves to an encounter with God, embracing Christ’s call, and embodying Christ in life?

**6. Please provide MCA with a picture** of your congregation’s tree display. If people are open to it, **record a video** clip of them placing a leaf on the tree, and provide that to MCA to be compiled into a video. ([communications@mcab.ca](mailto:communications@mcab.ca))

### **Prayer of Commitment and Celebration:**

God, You are all around us, wherever and whenever we are observant enough to seek You. Inspire in us the desire to embrace all of who You are and experience undeniably the vastness and deepness of Your love for us and all humankind. May each encounter and each embrace change us at the heart of who we are so that we may more fully embody You, naturally and always.

### **Benediction**

From Ephesians 3: 20-21 Now to the One who, by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21 to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

### Follow-up:

- Moving forward, we would like to share our stories with each other, encouraging each other by sharing, not only our successes, but the experience we have along our journey and perhaps even some of our less than hoped for results, recognizing that we are seekers, fellow pilgrims, family. How will you do this

in your own congregation? There is space on the MCA commitment form to share your experiences with the broader church.