

# **Worship for Spring Meeting of ECORC**

**May 23, 2025**

## **Opening Worship**

### **Call to Worship**

*Based on Isaiah 43 and Romans 15*

Come, people of God,  
Come with your past and your present,  
your grief and your gratitude,  
your questions and your quiet faith.

**We come, trusting that God is not finished with us yet.**

**We come, ready to move forward in hope.**

The Spirit is doing a new thing—can you see it?

A path is being made in the wilderness,  
streams are flowing in the desert.

**In Christ, the broken are made whole,  
the weary find rest,**

**and the future is open with promise.**

So let us worship God—

Who was, who is, and who is yet to be.

**Thanks be to God!**

### **Lighting of the Christ Candle**

We light this candle as a symbol of the light of Christ, which  
cannot be held back by distance, which shines in each one of us,  
no matter where we are.

### **Opening Prayer:**

God of every yesterday and every tomorrow,  
We gather in your presence today,  
Grateful for your love that never lets us go.

You know the weight we carry—  
our regrets, our worries, our fears about what comes next.  
And still, you call us forward.

Give us courage, O God,  
To step into the future with hearts wide open.  
Give us grace to let go of what we cannot change,  
and faith to believe that your Spirit is already ahead of us.

Renew us in this time of worship.  
Surround us with your peace.  
And plant in us a hope that will not fade.

In the name of Jesus Christ,  
our companion on the road,  
we pray.

**Amen.**

**Hymn:** “Hope of the World” (Voices United 215)

**Scripture Reading:** Hebrews 6:1-20

Hebrews 6 has been written to a people as words of encouragement focusing on the dangers of a shallow or immature faith. These are words of encouragement to continue learning, growing and developing a deeper relationship with God. They are words to encourage growing a faith that is not merely a profession of words but one that is manifested in a life of love, service and obedience.

Let us hear of God’s unwavering commitment to those who trust in God.

Therefore let us go on<sup>[a]</sup> toward perfection,<sup>[b]</sup> leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> instruction about baptisms and laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And we will do<sup>[c]</sup> this, if God permits. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, since they are crucifying again the Son of God to their own harm and are holding him up to contempt. <sup>7</sup> Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God.<sup>8</sup> But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over.

<sup>9</sup> Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. <sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the<sup>[d]</sup> love that you showed for his sake<sup>[e]</sup> in serving the saints, as you still do. <sup>11</sup> And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not become sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

## **The Certainty of God's Promise**

<sup>13</sup> When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, "I will surely bless you and multiply you." <sup>15</sup> And thus Abraham,<sup>[f]</sup> having patiently endured, obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> Humans, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all

dispute among them. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain,<sup>20</sup> where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Word of God for the people of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Anthem:** “There is a River in Judea”

**Sermon: Anchored in Hope**

Let me begin today not with a story, but with the truth.

**We are not alone.**

**We live in God's world.**

Those words — the very foundation of our United Church creed — ring truer now than ever, don't they?

Because today, we are standing in a time of great challenge.

Many of us have been watching as our church, like so many across the country, struggles with shrinking numbers, with financial pressures, with the changing tides of culture and community life. Sunday mornings don't look the way they used to. The pews may not be as full. The offering plates may not be as heavy.

And if we're honest, some days it feels like we're hanging on by threads of memory, threads of tradition, threads of longing.

But I am here to remind us this morning: God is not done with us.

We have come through these seasons of upheaval.

Congregations adjusting to change, adapting to hybrid worship, shrinking budgets, and aching questions: *What does the church look like now? What is ours to do next?* And into all this, the writer of Hebrews speaks:

"We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul..."

Friends, we are not drifting.

We are anchored.

This hope is not wishful thinking. It is not optimism painted with theological gloss. This is a *deep hope* — the kind that has survived shipwrecks, schisms, and pandemics. The kind that holds us when we don't know what the next step is — but we still take it anyway.

A small rural congregation — a church that had voted to close — came to their final service. The sanctuary was full that day, even standing room only. Not because of nostalgia alone, but because people wanted to *honour what hope looked like in that place*.

At the end of the service, they placed a simple anchor on the communion table. One of the elders said, "This doesn't mean we're done. It means we're moving the anchor to deeper waters." She was right. Some of those members joined new congregations. Some volunteered in the wider community. One even was discerning a call to ministry.

The building may close.

The anchor of hope does not.

## Isaiah 43:1-2 reminds us:

*"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you."*

God didn't say the waters wouldn't rise.

God didn't promise there wouldn't be fire.

But God did promise presence. God promised love.

God promised to call us by name and claim us as God's own — even now, even here.

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We are not the first generation of believers to face uncertainty.

In Acts 2:42–47, we read of the early church — small in number, unsure of its future. And what did they do? They devoted themselves to teaching, to fellowship, to breaking bread and praying together. They shared what they had. And the Spirit was with them.

They didn't have grand buildings. They didn't have endowments or bulletins printed in colour. But they had each other. And they had Christ.

And look what happened: "Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

It didn't start with a budget. It started with belonging.

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I know we miss the days when our sanctuaries were full. When children giggled in the Sunday School rooms. When choirs raised the rafters and we worried not about deficits, but about how many chairs to set out for coffee hour.

But hear me clearly — our worth as a community is not measured by how many people walk through these doors, but by how deeply we love the ones who do.

And how faithfully we serve the ones outside them.

Hebrews reminds us that hope is anchored *behind the veil* — in the very heart of God. It's a hope grounded in the living Christ, who went ahead of us, carrying not just our dreams but also our doubts. This is not a distant hope. It is an incarnate hope. A hope that walks among us, weeps with us, and still dares to rise again.

In these days of discernment and dreaming, we need not fear what comes next. We are part of a tradition that knows how to lament — but also how to *launch*.

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So what does it mean to be “anchored in hope” at this meeting?

1. **It means trusting that God is still speaking** — through remits and reports, through debates and dialogues, through laughter over coffee and tears in sacred pause.
2. **It means investing in the next generation** — not out of desperation, but out of conviction that God's Spirit has not retired.
3. **It means collaborating across regions, congregations, and communities** — because the anchor of hope is not tied to one shoreline alone.

It means singing of a love that colours outside the lines.

Will you join me?.. Let us take a moment to celebrate the bold, surprising movements of God's Spirit.

**MV 138 – “My Love Colours Outside the Lines”**

Jesus said in **Matthew 18:20**, *“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”*

Two or three. Not two hundred or three hundred.  
God never required a crowd — just a commitment.

So yes, things are changing. But God is still with us.

We may need to dream differently. We may need to worship in new ways. We may need to let go of some things to hold on more tightly to what matters most.

But resurrection always comes after death.  
New life always grows from letting go.  
And hope — Christian hope — is never about going back. It’s about trusting what God is doing next.

So here is my invitation to you today:

Let’s not be a people of fear.  
Let’s be a people of faith.  
Let’s not shrink into despair.  
Let’s rise in courage.

Let’s build a church where everyone knows they are loved, a community of belonging.  
Let’s be the ones who still sing — even if the notes are fewer, even if the choir is smaller.  
Let’s be the ones who keep showing up, who keep reaching out, who keep praying and laughing and crying and believing — together.

Because that’s what church really is.

Not a building. Not a balance sheet.  
A people. A community. A movement of grace and grit.



And you — yes, you — are a part of it.

I have heard it said that, “Hope is not the absence of struggle — it’s the refusal to give up.”

That’s who we are, United Church. We are *hope-bearers*.  
We are not naïve. We know the cost of ministry, the pain of transition, and the weariness of walking together for a long time.

But we are still here.  
We are still singing.  
We are still anchored.

Not in old models. Not in perfect plans.  
But in the Living God, who is making all things new.

May we be a people anchored in a hope that cannot be moved.  
May that hope steady our hearts, embolden our spirits and guide our ministry- today and always.

Amen.

**Hymn:** “Jesus call us o’er the tumult” VU562

## **Invitation to the Table**

Friends in Christ,  
This table is not the table of any one church, but the table of Jesus Christ.  
All who seek to walk in the light of love, all who hunger for grace, all who thirst for renewal—  
Come. There is room here for you.

We come not because we are perfect,  
but because we are loved.

This is the table where our past is held in mercy,  
our present is embraced with grace,  
and our future is opened in hope.

Let us lift up our hearts.

### **Prayer of Great Thanksgiving**

God of life and love,  
We give you thanks and praise.  
You breathed your Spirit over the waters of creation  
and brought forth all that is.  
You called a people to walk in your ways,  
and when the path was difficult or unclear,  
you sent prophets to speak your word of hope.

When we grew weary, you did not abandon us.  
When we lost our way, you stayed with us.  
You came to us in Jesus Christ—  
our teacher, our healer, our companion on the road.

Through him you taught us love without condition,  
mercy without measure, and hope that endures beyond death.

And so, with all who have gone before us,  
with the saints and angels,  
with those who gather around tables near and far,  
we join in the unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy God,  
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.**

### **Words of Institution**

On the night before he gave his life,  
Jesus gathered with his friends.  
He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, saying:  
*“This is my body, broken for you.  
Take and eat.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”*

Then he took the cup, saying:  
*“This cup is the new covenant,  
sealed in my blood, poured out for you and for many.  
Whenever you drink it,  
do this in remembrance of me.”*

We remember Christ's death,  
We celebrate Christ's resurrection,  
We await Christ's coming again.

### **Prayer of Consecration**

Come, Holy Spirit—  
Bless these gifts of bread and cup,  
and bless us as we receive them.

May they nourish in us  
the courage to release what is past,  
the faith to live fully in the present,  
and the hope to walk boldly into your future.

In this meal, may we be made one—  
One with Christ, one with each other,  
and one in ministry to all the world,  
until Christ comes again and we feast together in love's fullness.

This we pray in the name of Jesus,  
our hope, our peace, our life.

**Amen.**

## **Prayer After Communion:**

Let us pray.

God of Grace and Glory,  
We give you thanks for this holy mystery,  
in which you have fed us with your love,  
and nourished us with the presence of Christ.

In this bread and cup,  
you have reminded us that hope is never lost—  
for it is born anew each time we gather,  
each time we remember,  
each time we trust in your promises.

Though the world may tremble,  
and our lives may bend beneath the weight of sorrow,  
you, O God, remain our steady light.  
In you, we find courage to carry on,  
faith to step forward,  
and hope that does not disappoint.

Send us out now with hearts uplifted.  
Let the taste of grace linger on our tongues  
and the vision of your kingdom stir in our souls.  
Help us to live as people of hope—  
rooted in your love,  
shaped by your justice,  
and led by your Spirit.

In Christ's name we pray,  
Amen.

**Hymn: “Three Things I Promise”    MV176**

**Benediction**

As we go into this time together,  
May the love of God ground you,  
The peace of Christ guide you,  
And the power of the Holy Spirit go before you  
To make a way where there is no way.

May you walk forward in hope—  
Not because the road is easy,  
But because you do not walk it alone.

Go in peace,  
To love and to serve,  
And to live into the future God is already preparing.

**Amen.**