

# ALL-CONFERENCE WORSHIP SERVICE

## SUNDAY, JUNE 12, 2016

### INSTRUCTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

\* Presuming that each church has its own traditions regarding opening, closing and other elements of worship, we provide this “Worship in a Box” as a Microsoft Word document that you may edit and adjust for your local setting.

\* In several places, we have provided two hymns from which to choose. We suggest choosing your hymns in advance and editing the bulletin accordingly by deleting the unused hymn.

\* The following script includes all of the parts for the leader or leaders highlighted in yellow.

***WE HIGHLY RECOMMEND THAT THE PERSON LEADING THE CHILDREN’S MESSAGE, AND THE PERSON DELIVERING THE MESSAGE REHEARSE IN ADVANCE!!***

\* The Children’s Sermon and the Message are printed below *AND* provided as a separate document.

\* For the children’s message, you will need  
--- a very large see-through container. It could be a pyrex (no smaller than 9x13) or a large mixing bowl or a big Tupperware container or a glass table centerpiece filled about halfway up with water.  
--- a variety of small items (a few pebbles, a bouncy ball, a paper clip, a feather or leaf, a small stick, etc. Include items that will sink as well as items that will float.)

\* Notice in the sermon/message, that there is a sung response in several places.

\* The offerings at the on-site worship services of the RMC Annual Meeting will be distributed to two sources: The Volunteers of America Resource Center for Homeless Youth in Salt Lake City and the conference’s efforts to send kids to the National Youth Event. If you wish, you are welcome to take a special offering for those causes and send the proceeds to the conference office marked as “Annual Meeting offering.”

*Bold type invites the congregation to respond in unison.  
\* This symbol invites the congregation to rise in body or spirit.*

**\* GATHERING HYMN**

“We Gather Together” (NCH 421)

“This Is the Day” (NCH 84)

**\* CALL TO WORSHIP**

**ONE:** We gather today in the vineyard of God’s grace and love.

**ALL:** Jesus has invited us here, saying to us, “Abide in me as I abide in you.”

**ONE:** We live in Jesus Christ and work for the fruit of the vineyard of God’s making.

**ALL:** Those who abide in Jesus blossom and flourish in God’s wondrous love.

**ONE:** We are sanctified by this work of caring for the vines, arbors and grapes of God’s wondrous creation.

**ALL:** Let us worship and praise God for the opportunity to share in this sacred and eternal work of making all things whole and new.

**\* INVOCATION**

**ONE:** Let us pray.

**ALL:** God of city dwellers, mountain skiers and highland farmers, God of developing nations and of industrial powers, God of laborers and of administrators, your people speak many languages and experience you in many ways. From the mountains and streams of Colorado to the arches and peaks of Utah and the high plains of Southern Wyoming, we experience your presence throughout this Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ. Help us to hear today all the ways you reach out to us, and to discern your will for our lives. Amen.

**CHILDREN’S MESSAGE**

**ONE:** Hello young friends!

Today we are going to do a science experiment on waves and ripples. What do you know about waves and ripples?

*(Some may be able to speak of being at the ocean or seeing ripples when the wind blows across a lake or when they are in the bathtub. The older ones / more scientific ones may be able to talk about sound waves or waves of light. Be ready to affirm every response.)*

*Some questions that may help get them talking:*

Have you ever seen a wave? (not the hand kind.) Where were you?

What do you think causes waves and ripples in water?

Let’s try to see some ripples right here in church. Come and gather around this bowl / dish. I’m going to give each of you a ripple-maker.

*(or if that is not realistic because you have too many kids, just give out a predetermined number of items. Hand out the ripple makers to the children.)*

I am going to ask you, Charlie, to start our experiment by dropping your ripple maker into the bowl. I want the rest of you to watch very carefully when Charlie drops his ripple-maker into the bowl and count the ripples.

Go ahead, Charlie.

*(Pause.)*

“How many ripples did Charlie’s pebble make?”

*(Take numbers. Every answer is correct. Be astounded at the many different numbers and the big effect of Charlie’s little pebble.*

*Go on to the next child and repeat. If the item sinks, you may choose to leave it in the bowl. If the item floats, go ahead and remove it before the next child drops their item in.)*

What if our bowl was the size of this room? Would we have the same number of ripples?”

*(They will likely tell you that there will be more. This will be useful later when you talk about the impact of a small ripple-maker on the whole world.*

*Once half of the items have been dropped in the bowl, share the scripture with the children and ask them:)*

**Do you think people can have a ripple effect?**

*(Prod them with examples:)*

What if one person is kind to a stranger? Might that stranger behave differently that day?

What if one person takes care of someone who is hurting? Might that make the person heal faster?

What if you say give someone a compliment? Might that make a person feel better about themselves?

*(While you speak this next part, ask the kids who have not yet dropped their ripple maker into the bowl to go ahead and drop it in and watch how far the ripples go.)*

Jesus asks us to make ripples. This scripture passage is about how love, holiness, truth and prayer ripples out from the center and impact others in ways we can't imagine. Jesus loves us. We love ourselves. We love each other. And those who we love, love others. Jesus says that this makes us all one. Why? Because how many ripple-makers does it take to make 10 *(use a number here that the children counted earlier)* ripples? That's right – one. Because we are all one in Christ. Christ is in us. We are all joined as one by being part of this family of faith.

I in you and

you in me and

them in us and

ALL of this is because God sends us out to make ripples in the world. God is the center and God places Godself in each of us and asks us to impact the world around us in holy, loving, truthful, prayer-filled ways.

Do you think you can do this? I do. In fact, I'm sure of it because you already are! Let's all gather and put our fingertips in the water while we pray.

Gracious and loving God, you ask us make waves in our world. Help us to know that even the smallest thing, when we do it in faith and love, will ripple outward into your world and make things better. Help us to trust our ripple-makers and to trust that you are carrying those ripples out into creation to change lives. In Christ's name, Amen.

**\* HYMN**

“Jesus Loves Me” (NCH 327)

“Draw the Circle Wide” (SING 123)

**\* AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**ONE:** We are not alone, we live in God's world.

**ALL:** We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust in God. We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope. In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

*(Since our last Annual Meeting, the UCC has now become in full communion with UCCanada, and this is the United Church of Canada's “New Creed” of 1990.)*

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**ONE:** Let us pray our confession.

**ALL:** Most merciful God, you call us to be in relationship, community and in communion with one another across vast geographies, theologies and identities. You call us to overcome divisions caused by conflict and by being too busy with our lives and insular ministries. We confess that we have not always remained in touch with our siblings in Christ outside of our congregation. We confess that often the work of church becomes the work of maintaining buildings or recruiting new members. Help us to recall the Gospel in all we do and to renew our commitment to radical hospitality and connection. For if you, our God of the Universe, can so radically and intimately connect to us human beings, then surely we can find new ways to stay connected in our journey. Amen.

## ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

**ONE:** Rest assured and confident that you are forgiven by the God who cannot be separated from us. The vine remains intact, the state of the vineyard is sure and strong. We are God's people now and in all of our tomorrows called to the work of being radically connected, vine to vine and person to person, in this United Church of Christ. Amen.

## READING

**ONE:** Today's reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verses 1 through 5, and chapter 17, verses 17 to 23.

<sup>15:1</sup> "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. ...

<sup>17:17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. <sup>20</sup> "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Here ends the reading.

## MESSAGE

**ONE:** In Jesus' desert landscape, lentils and barley were common. Figs and dates were, too. But when Jesus went looking for a way to describe his sense of abiding connection with God and those around him, the grapevine was what spoke to him. The metaphor still rings true: Christ grounds and nourishes us as we who are his branches reach far, grow strong, and bear good fruit.

As the Rocky Mountain Conference worships this morning, we resemble that sturdy, vibrant grapevine Jesus lifts up in John's gospel. We, too, stretch in many directions. Yet unlike a map with round-headed pins zeroing in on our individual locations, Jesus' image calls and challenges us to experience ourselves as we truly are: one in his love as we overlap in surprising places and unusual ways (as grapevines so easily do) in what we in the Rocky Mountain Conference call being "radically connected."

Especially this morning we revel in our inherent unity as we worship here in this place following the same liturgy that our sister churches across three states are using. Better still, those gathered in Salt Lake at Annual Meeting are worshipping with this same service, too. Quite literally, we all on the same page today!

Holding fast to Jesus' image of a vine and its branches, let's now hear how fruit-bearing efforts across the Rocky Mountain Conference are growing out of our rootedness in Christ.

First a fun story from the Intermountain Association, which includes congregations in Utah and southwestern Wyoming. Last January, Rev. Gage Church, pastor of Congregational UCC of Ogden, Utah, sent out an invitation to the eleven churches (fact check!!) of his association (which includes all of Utah and southwestern Wyoming) inviting them to join in a friendly competition. Which congregation could gather up the most donations of food and dollars in the UCC's annual Souper Bowl of Caring?

In his role as Director of Communications Ministries, Cory Kibler promptly highlighted this effort in the RoMoCo News. Before you know it, someone from Community Congregational UCC of Manitou Springs in the Southeast Association was contacting Rev. Church with this happy inquiry: could that congregation participate in the Souper Bowl of Caring Challenge, too, even though they were almost 600 miles away?

What a Spirit-led desire! This is exactly the kind of thing we all dreamed would happen when in 2014 our conference formally embraced its vision, Be Radically Connected, calling us into a future where individuals, groups, and congregations across our three-state region would find creative and lively ways to encourage, collaborate with, and participate in each other's efforts.

When the Souper Bowl of Caring competition was over and the seven participating churches reported their results, it was clear Manitou Springs had taken the challenge very seriously. In combined donations of food and money, they were a close second to First Congregational in Rock Springs, WY. Not to be outdone by the larger churches, however, modest-sized Kingsbury Community UCC in Vernal, Utah, earned bragging rights for having the highest per capita giving.

Stretch and reach. That's what branches on grapevines do. How can we not smile at the God-inspired reaching across distance and association affiliation that enabled Christ's followers at opposite ends of our conference to work together for the common good!

Pause for a moment to prayerfully ask: How might Christ be working here to inspire a reaching across the miles to partner with a far-flung church or association?

*Optional sung response:*

*"Spirit of the Living God"--TNCH # 283. Consider using "us" instead of "me"*

Another way Christ's branches reach and stretch is choosing to be creative when "the way we've always done it" bears diminishing fruit. That's what's happening these days in our Western Association as folks from Union Congregational UCC in Crested Butte envision new ways to minister to youth—its own and those of their high country community.

Union's pastor, Rev. Tim Clark, explains: "We're a mountain town and most weekends our teens who are on sports teams are away competing. Meeting weekly just wasn't working as well as we wanted, so we looked for another way to gather our youth for faith formation and fellowship."

Crested Butte's freshly-launched effort centers around offering periodic experiences that are designed to be more substantial than two-hour weekly meetings allow. In the works are outings that will be more like mini-camp experiences or little retreats; these will include middle and high schoolers from other congregations, as well as those youth with no church affiliation. One trip will send youth to be in mission together in southern Colorado's San Luis Valley. Another outing will be to the small community of Olathe, CO, for a weekend of Christian music. Time on a high country lake with Rev. Clark as their capable guide is being planned, as well.

Not only is Union's model a fresh way to offer programming for youth who are frequently unable to make weekly gatherings, it's a new way of envisioning adult leadership, too. A whole host of church members is signing on to oversee just one youth experience each.

This design offers a double blessing. Not only will youth have more adults to form relationships with, more adults in the church will have an opportunity to be stretched and changed by their youthful charges. In an age of increasing separation between the generations, the lines between young and old in Crested Butte will surely blur, not unlike the way a vine and its branches seamlessly interconnect.

Take a moment to ask yourself: What unexpected fruit might form in this season of this church's life by choosing to come at something in a new way?

*Optional sung response:*

*"Spirit of the Living God"--TNCH # 283. Consider using "us" instead of "me"*

Have you ever noticed how far tendrils on a grapevine stretch sometimes? This is happening in the Platte Valley Association. This association extends south from Casper, Wyoming, to Loveland, Colorado, and east across the Plains to the Kansas border. Here we find two congregations separated by 230 miles who are both reaching out, each in different ways, to address hunger in their respective settings.

In Windsor, Colorado, Faith UCC has "A Place at the Table," which serves a free dinner every Wednesday night; it's one of three evening meals sponsored by churches in their town. Four hours away at Community UCC in Casper, Wyoming, that congregation is helping feed people's spirits by way of Melrose Coffeehouse, a smoke-free, alcohol-free Friday night happening during the fall, winter, and spring months, a time when Casper's outdoor venues prove much too chilly for musicians and music-lovers alike.

With space and love to share, both congregations are reaching out to those who need not only food for body and soul but who are also hungering for affirming, caring community in a world where social isolation is far too common.

Now in its third year, Casper's Friday night coffeehouse draws in those who have expressed little interest in Sunday morning worship or church in general; they are becoming what that church's pastor, Rev. Dee Lundberg, calls "a community within community." Musicians perform for tips and church volunteers run a coffee bar that features espresso drinks and desserts, the proceeds of which have helped purchase musical instruments for local school children and have provided fresh fruits and vegetables for patrons of Casper's Food for Thought food bank.

That same wonderful wider reach that branches on vines do and which Community UCC is doing is also evidenced in Windsor. Rev. Fred Evenson happily reports that when members of the wider community hear about the hosting his church is doing, they eagerly to sign on to assist.

Boundaries between guests and hosts blur, and those gathered any given Wednesday night get a taste of the unity Christ's grapevine and branch image so vividly affirms.

Prayerfully consider what you might have in common with a congregation at a distance who—at root—is seeking to minister in ways your congregation cares about.

*Optional sung response:*

*"Spirit of the Living God"--TNCH # 283. Consider using "us" instead of "me"*

Look closely at a grapevine; it's like a loose braid as branches weave in and over each other, offering mutual support as the whole vine goes about producing good fruit. That braiding and fruit-bearing is happening in many exciting ways in our Metro Denver Association.

Here's one beautiful example. Sixth Avenue UCC's city-center location and its abundant space make that congregation the ideal host the Denver Women's Homeless Initiative. Since February 2015, Sixth Avenue has been partners with thirteen other hosting churches and organizations in providing overnight hospitality for 20 women from a nearby day shelter. In this entirely lay-run effort, the church provides an evening meal and sleeping space on cots, and then sends participants off in the morning with breakfast and the blessing of having had a safe place to get a good night's rest.

Certainly this housing program meets a critical need. But there are other equally vital needs this program is meeting, as well: those of churchgoers who feel called to this kind of ministry but whose home churches are too far from the city center to be hosts in this program.

Sixth Avenue's pastor, Rev. Chris Gilmore, is quick to point to the ways members from Parkview UCC in Aurora are key to the success of this program, as are those who drive in from First Plymouth in Englewood and Wheat Ridge UCC. "We have the place but not the people. And other churches have the people but not the place," Rev. Gilmore says, reminding us that when we engage in service on Christ's behalf, mutual support is just part of the design. No church stands alone. We are a part of a greater whole and when we discover this, amazing things can and do happen.

Especially exciting to those who have felt called to become involved in hosting is news of a 50 unit housing development being built on Colfax Avenue that will provide a longer-term solution for women living with homelessness. From the branches of caring service Sixth Avenue, Parkview, First Plymouth, and Wheat Ridge are offering even sweeter fruit is now beginning to grow.

Pause for a moment to ponder how you could produce good fruit with a congregation near you.

*Optional sung response:*

*"Spirit of the Living God"--TNCH # 283. Consider using "us" instead of "me"*

If you've ever looked closely at vines in a vineyard, you know every single branch's impulse is the same: to stretch and reach as far as possible as it goes about supporting the vine's production of good fruit.

The United Church of Christ shares this impulse, too. We celebrate our radical hospitality and express this commitment often and in countless creative ways—from websites, to banners hanging off bell towers, to placards raised high in parades, to announcing as Sunday worship begins: "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

Our closing story comes from Vista Grande UCC in Colorado Springs where they are a part of the Southeast Association. Their recent experience invites us consider how reaching further than ever before has the power to not only transform the one being embraced but those doing the embracing, as well.

Last summer, Vista Grande welcomed into its midst someone new, someone unlike anyone that faithful flock had ever embraced before. A staff sergeant at nearby Ft. Carson, Patricia (Trish) King was a three-tour combat veteran and the Army's first openly transgender infantryman. While the Army has since 2011 welcomed into its ranks out gay and lesbian soldiers, King's transgendered life was a violation of regulations and a fire-able offense.

Although years before Vista Grande had successfully gone through the Open and Affirming process, their discussions and discernment focused on the needs and realities of gay and lesbian people—and in this way they mirrored our culture's inclinations. As a transgender woman, Trisha's arrival at Vista Grande a year ago gave the church an opportunity to live even more fully into their ONA identity. Their pastor, Rev. Clare Twomey, is quick to say they did this quickly and wholeheartedly, and in a way that wasn't particularly exceptional but which simply reflected that congregation's profoundly loving spirit.

Soon the congregation had a media sensation on its hands with Trish, as news outlets like The Colorado Springs Gazette, National Public Radio, and The New York Times began highlighting her journey to remain in the Army and serve with the full rights and privileges afforded all servicemen and women. In her interviews, Trish was always quick to point to her life-giving relationship with Vista Grande and the strength and support she drew from the congregation's abiding support.

Talk about reaching and stretching—now a nation, even the world, was learning about how the love of Christ was being made real through one particular community, one specific branch on his vine.

It's easy to focus on the outward reaching and stretching of branches that Christ intends. But he asks us to do that work inwardly, as well. Vista Grande's embrace of Trish King didn't just affect Trish; it transformed everyone in the church. Individuals grew and changed, and the congregation did too, as together they discovered that the love they'd been given to share went wider and deeper than they imagined. "What made Vista Grande exceptional," their pastor says proudly, "is how readily they grasped the call to become different themselves, not just to welcome someone in and have that person be part of them."

Still so new that it's hard to grab hold of just yet, there's a quiet branch of possibility growing at Vista Grande now. It's not that they welcomed in a transgendered, trailblazing woman. What's unfolding is bigger than that. As Vista Grande experiences a time of renewal and fresh visioning, as they seek a new physical location to call home, there is a sense developing that God is calling them to a future that includes growth far more exciting than more people in worship. The growth Christ is nurturing at Vista Grande which will be richer and more exciting than mere number. The congregation might not talk about vines and branches but they know they're entering a time of reaching and stretching toward new ways to be the church together, new ways to be in service to the Christ in whom their lives are anchored in common. It's anyone's guess what the fruits of this journey will yield but in Christ, we can be confident that the harvest will be abundant.

Ponder for a moment: in what ways is Christ inviting you or this congregation to stretch and reach inwardly?



Optional sung response:

*“Spirit of the Living God”--TNCH # 283. Consider using “us” instead of “me”*

Look closely at a grapevine and you will see a wild tangle of browns and greens, a lattice-work of branches that reach, stretch, and flow together in undulating, fruitful beauty. We grow together like that here in the Rocky Mountain Conference and it's a remarkable thing to behold. We can't take the credit for that, though--the glory goes to Christ!

Amen.

## OFFERING

*The offerings taken in worship at the Rocky Mountain Conference UCC Annual Meeting will be distributed to the Volunteers of America Resource Center for Homeless Youth in Salt Lake City and to the conference's efforts to send youth to the National Youth Event this summer.*

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**ONE:** Let us pray.

**ALL:** Gracious Friend and tender of the vineyard, your blessings to us are free and abundant. it is with grateful hearts that we present our tithes and offerings, believing that you will multiply and use them in order that the realm of God on earth will bear much fruit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## \* HYMN

“Many Are the Lightbeams” (NCH 163)

## SHARING OF JOYS AND CONCERNS

## TIME FOR SILENT PRAYER

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

**ONE:** Let us pray.

**ALL:** Loving God,  
You nourish us with love and grace every day.  
When we live in you,  
Your love flows out from us  
Into every relationship,  
Every word,  
Every thought,  
Every action.  
Help us to use your love as a guide for others,  
So that all will come to blossom  
In your creative and forgiving love.  
Help us also to live out your love  
At home,  
At work,  
At school,  
On the highway,  
And with friends,  
Neighbors,  
And even strangers.  
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,

**Who is our Peace.  
Amen.**

**THE LORD'S PRAYER / THE JESUS PRAYER**

**\* HYMN**

“In the Midst of New Dimensions” (NCH 391)  
“Forward Through the Ages” (NCH 377)

**\* BENEDICTION**

**ONE:** May the love of God shelter you when you need to be sheltered, challenge you when you need to be challenged, lead you when you are lost and help you to continue to abide in the vineyard of Christ. Amen.