

Dear Vermont Conference churches,

May 7, 2013

A complete worship service has been designed for your use on Annual Meeting Sunday June 2nd, using the theme, “Faith at the Edges”. This service can be entirely led by lay readers, so that your pastor may attend the entire conference meeting. It includes 3 options for the sermon, and a communion service. All materials can be adapted to suit your particular setting and format.

1. Hymn suggestions are all taken from the New Century Hymnal. If you use another hymnal, you will find many of these same hymns, or choose your own.
2. Sermon Option A - “Scripture Reading and Sacred Questions” would best be read by two readers. You can either allow for some silence after the questions to let people ponder them, or engage in dialogue, inviting the congregation to share some of their responses.

Sermon Option B is the video sermon, “Original Blessing” by our Annual Meeting keynote presenter, Rev. Robin Meyers. He has given permission for VT Conference churches to download and/or play this sermon on June 2nd. Meanwhile, he will be preaching on the same topic, at our Annual Meeting Sunday Communion Service.

Sermon Option C is a scripture drama “On the Wilderness Road” for 4-5 readers. You can offer this with minimal staging and costumes. Print out copies for each reader and highlight their part. Allow for one or two read-throughs ahead of time, and let the readers use their scripts.

If you like, have the whole congregation play the part of the Spirit, by writing their lines on cue cards and raising them at the appropriate times. Or have a single reader play the part of the Spirit.

Choose hymns that fit the sermon option you have selected.

3. The communion service assumes that you have had your pastor consecrate the elements ahead of time, so that any lay person can preside at communion.
4. Sources for this service include the Iona Community, which gives permission for use in worship when attribution is noted in the program. All other elements of the service, including the Sacred Questions, and drama “On the Wilderness Road” were written by Rev. Martha Peck. Permission is granted for use on this Sunday or other dates with attribution in the program.
5. The theme hymn for Annual Meeting weekend “Meet us here, At the Edge” was written by Martha Peck and Kathy Eddy and is included for your use. It comes with chords for your accompanist. If you would like a version with full accompaniment, contact Kathy Eddy at kathywonsoneddy@gmail.com.
6. Also included is a bulletin insert about Friends of the Vermont Conference for Vermont Conference Sunday designated as June 2 in conjunction with Annual Meeting.

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Worship @ the Edges
Vermont Conference Common Worship
June 2nd, 2013

We Gather in God's Holy Presence

Prelude

Introit

Call to Worship:

Leader: It is a new day, and God calls us with a fresh invitation:
Step into the future, grounded in the passionate vision of the prophets.
Celebrate the durable traditions of churchly faith,
but move always with the Spirit, to the edges:
Risk everything for love, and know that Christ goes before you.

Opening Hymn: # 73 Enter, Rejoice and Come in, or #84 "This is the day"
or #54 O Praise, the Gracious Power

Prayer: Jesus as we gather in this sacred space,
help us to fasten our eyes on you,
and to tune our ears to the sound of your voice.
May we rediscover the wonder of good news,
and the courage to step out to the edges.
Visit our hometowns and our steeped sanctuaries
with your daring, compassionate, world-changing presence.
Use us, with all our shameful faults and our dazzling capacities.
Indeed, it is a new day, and we are here to live it with you. Amen.

Call to Confession:

*Let us, in silence, admit all that has separated us from God,
in our lives, in our relationships, and in our local and global communities.*

Silent Prayer

Words of Assurance/ Affirmation of Faith**

We believe in a bright an amazing God,
who has been to the depths of despair on our behalf:
who has risen in splendor and majesty;
who decorates the universe
with sparkling water, clear white light,
twinkling stars and sharp colors,
over and over again.
We believe that Jesus is the light of the world,
that God believes in us and trusts us,
even though we make the same mistakes over and over again.
We commit ourselves to Jesus,
to one another as brothers and sisters,

**and to the Maker's business in the world.
God said: "Let there be light." Amen.**

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(Gloria Patri)

We Hear God's Holy Word

Anthem

Scripture Reading and Sermon: Choose from options below,
(for Option A and C, see attachments)

Option A. Luke 4:16-31 and Sacred Questions (for two readers)
Hymn: #497 Guide My Feet or #495 Called As Partners

Option B. Video sermon by Keynote Speaker Rev. Robin Myers: "Original Blessing"
Hymn: # 423 Great is your Faithfulness, or #35 O Mighty God
Genesis 1:26-28, Matthew 5:1-16 at http://vimeo.com/moogaloop.swf?clip_id=53781129
or <http://vimeo.com/53781129>

Option C. "On the Wilderness Road" a drama based on Acts 8:27-39, for 4-5 readers.
#527 We offer Christ or #495 I love to Tell the Story

Or use our conference theme hymn: "Meet us Here, at the Edge" (attached)
Select verses according to which scripture and topic you are exploring.

We Respond in Faith and Love

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer

Call to Share

Offertory

Doxology

Offering Prayer*

Leader: The sky does it simply, naturally, day by day.
The sun does it joyfully, like someone in love,
like a runner on the starting line,
The sky, the sun, they just can't help themselves.
No loud voices, no grand speeches,
But everyone sees and is happy with them.

People: **Make us like that, Lord,
so that our faith is not in our words, but in our lives,
not in what we say, but in who we are,
passing on your love like an infectious laugh:
not worried, not threatening, just shining**

**like the sun, like a starry night,
like a lamp on a stand—light for life,
your light for our lives. Amen.**

**"After Psalm 19" © Kathy Galloway from 50 Great Prayers from the Iona Community compilation © Neil Paynter, Glasgow, UK: Wild Goose Publications, 2009, p. 71, non-commercial use for worship permitted.*

We Feast at the Lord's Table

Communion Hymn #332 As We Gather or #335 Come, Gather in this Sacred Place

Invitation to Communion

Leader : The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.

People: **Blessed are wild forests and tended fields, the busy cities and the vast oceans.**

Leader: The table is the Lord's, and the welcome thereof.

People: **Blessed is every friend who gathers in Jesus' name:
wounded, eager, persevering, questioning, hopeful.**

Leader: The loaf is the Lord's and the fragrance thereof.

People: **Blessed is the wheat, mixed and kneaded, baked and broken for us.**

Leader: The cup is the Lord's and the sweetness thereof.

People: **Blessed are the grapes, tended, ripe and juicy, pressed and poured for us.**

Leader: The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

People : **Blessed is the vulnerability of the planet, and the resilience of life.
Blessed is the weakness and strength of humankind.**

Leader: The invitation is the Lord's and the promise thereof.

People: **Blessed is the second chance, the new way of seeing,
the call to service, the joy of extravagant grace.
Blessed is the Christ who calls, feeds and sends us.**

Words of Institution (see pages 84-86 in UCC Book of Worship or use the following)

Let us recall the words and acts of Jesus. He was at the table with his friends, sharing a meal.

And he gave thanks for the bread, lifting it up, breaking it, and sharing it with them.

He said: This is my body, broken for you. Take it and eat it; so you will become my body in the world I love." And then he raised the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant. Drink it, share it and remember me, always."

Communion Prayer: Holy God, we share these gifts of transforming grace, believing that you are present among us. As the bread and wine have been consecrated for holy use, so may we be consecrated, as we share them, for service in a hurting world. Make us holy, not to live apart from the world or above it, but fully immersed in its needs, and alive to its loveliness. Feed our hungers, fill us with your living spirit of grace, and send us forth, attuned to your presence everywhere. Amen.

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

Ministering to you in Christ's name, we give you the bread/the cup.

"Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus said. "Take and eat."

"Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus said, "Take and drink."

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Here, O God, we have touched the edge of your garments.

We have tasted the sweetness of forgiveness.

We have seen your likeness, in the faces circled around this table.

We have glimpsed what life can be, whole and holy at the center,
rippling out to the farthest reaches of earth and heaven.

Now we rise from the table to lift our voices in song and to move our bodies in service.

Thank you for all that is good, all that is holy. Amen.

Closing Hymn: #538 Standing at the Future's Threshold or #77 Lord, Dismiss us

Benediction (*congregation faces center to bless one another*)

Left: Lord, you have searched us and known us,

Right: And now you send us out.

Left: We trust that wherever we go,

Right: Whether we are at the centers of power,

Left: Or on the wild and desolate edges of town,

Right: You will be there, to guide us and strengthen us.

All: **So, go with God. Go with courage;
trusting in the power of love. Amen.**

Postlude

Option A

Scripture Reading and Sacred Questions

Luke 4:16-31

In your bulletin you will find a strip of paper. As you listen and reflect on today's Scripture, you are invited to write a question on your strip; one that resonates for you. It may be one of the questions you hear, or one of your own. Put the paper in your pocket, and carry that question with you throughout the week, as we encounter God at the edges....

A: He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.

B: As was his custom... How do the habits of faith shape us? What happens, when regular, repeated hearing of Scripture seeps into our souls? How do the habits of faith influence our commitments, and our choices?

Many of our churches are struggling in a region where less than 20 percent of the population attend religious services. What gifts do we church folk bring to public discourse? Why bother to persevere in gathering, praying, listening, building sacred community?

A: Unrolling the scroll, Jesus found the place where it is written, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' Then he rolled up the scroll gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

B: When have you fastened, really fastened your eyes on Jesus? What draws you to him? When you listen for his voice, what does he say to you? To your church?

A: He said to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

B: Gracious words.... Words of grace. What words of grace have changed your life? You are forgiven. God loves you. Good news! ...for the poor, for the prisoner. Freedom, recovery, blessing.... This is the year of the Lord's favor.

Why, sometimes, do we have trouble believing that these same gracious words are equally distributed beyond our church, beyond the boundaries of our own tightly knit communities?

A: Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me, 'Physician, heal yourself.' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what you did at Capernaum.'"

B: In your hometown.... Hometowns are places of belonging, of familiarity. They are places of safety, where community runs deep, and neighborliness is a multi-colored quilt of comfort. But hometowns can also be places where roles and reputations become fixed...where people get stuck. What are some of the joys and frustrations of the place you call home?

For many of us the church is a second “home.” How do you define the circle of belonging that is your church home? Who is included? Who is excluded? How do the familiarity and intimacy of our communities of faith reveal God’s intentions for the world? Can this same familiarity prevent us from seeing what God is trying to do?

A: “Truly I tell you” he continued, “No prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy, in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian. All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of town and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff....

B: Here is Jesus, driven out of church and out of town, to the brow of the hill, to the precipice of the cliff edge. Can we separate ourselves from him in this moment? Do we have to follow him there? Could it be that we too have to leave the church (or at least the church as we know it, the church as it has grown comfortable for us) in order to follow him? What cliff edges are before us? Where is the danger in today’s gospel?

Can the gospel be both good news and risky business? Where do we go from here?

A: But Jesus walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

B: We too are on our way. Where will today’s worship lead us? To the edges and beyond? To intense listening and engaged action? To reckless faith and renewed commitment? Beyond our disappointments and weariness, as we find new purpose, new strength?

Let us be on our way, with a faith grounded in ancient truths, and alive to present opportunities. Amen.

Option C

On the Wilderness Road

Worship drama based on Acts 8:27-39

Narrator, Philip, Modern, Ethiopian, Spirit

Narrator at podium, Ethiopian on other side stage, Philip and modern in congregation, moving towards each other, and then onto stage. Spirit is either an unseen voice, or whole congregation.

Narrator: *Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip:*

Spirit: *Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.*

Philip and Modern: *This is a wilderness road!*

Spirit: Every road, at one time or another is a wilderness road.

Modern: (*fiddling with phone*) I've never been here before. And my GPS isn't working. How will I know which way to go?

Philip: (*worried*) Anything might happen on this road. And I'm on my own.

Narrator: [But] *he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home. Seated in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah.*

Modern: He's not from here

Philip: He doesn't look like one of us.

Modern: He's dressed funny

Philip: I'm not sure we even speak the same language.

Modern: I can't relate to him at all, with those fancy wheels and that crazy head wrap.

Philip: I was raised to steer clear of strangers.

Narrator: *Then the Spirit said to Philip,*

Spirit: *Go over to this chariot and join it.*

(Philip expresses surprise, fear, and finally tentative acceptance as he approaches the Ethiopian. Modern follows curiously.)

Narrator: *So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah.*

Philip: What does it mean to you?

Modern: What questions do you have about this?

Philip: *Do you understand what you are reading?*

Ethiopian: *How can I unless someone guides me?*

Modern: He was clueless. He didn't know the Doxology, or even the Lord's Prayer!

But.... he was curious... And the way he held that Bible.... Like it was alive!

Philip: (*wonderingly*) He really wanted to know. But where should I start?
How could I sum up the whole gospel in a few sentences, here by the side of the road?

Modern: How do you begin to explain the exegetical implications of the Hebrew prophets for the soteriological significance of the Christ, to someone you just met?

Spirit: You start by sitting down.

Narrator: *And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of scripture that he was reading was this.*

Ethiopian: (*haltingly*) “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before it shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth....”

About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet speak, about himself or someone else?

Narrator: *Then Philip began to speak, and starting with the scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.*

Philip: We expected the Messiah to conquer, but we were surprised when by the way he conquered-- with love, not brute power.

Modern: Following him won't make you rich.

Philip: His suffering and courage give us hope.

Modern: He never stops loving, even when the world rejects him.

Philip: And now, risen from the dead, he welcomes everyone into the beloved community.

Ethiopian: Everyone? Even eunuchs? Even Ethiopians?

Modern: Even kids in foster care? Even drunks?

Ethiopian: Even tone deaf singers? Even wealthy bureaucrats?

Modern: Even Ivy leagues graduates? Even high school dropouts?

Spirit: (*Pick one, and speak aloud, voices overlapping*)

Everyone! Even me! He picked me too! Amazing, isn't it? Even _____

Philip: We who are his followers have discovered great joy in acts of self-emptying service. Somehow, mysteriously, his painful death has brought us all new and vibrant life. We have come to believe it was all part of God's intention all along.

Narrator: *As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said:*

Ethiopian: *Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?*
Stop! Stop right here!

Philip: But... it's just a little pond. And you haven't read the whole book yet. Besides, I'm not the best teacher. Don't you want to wait until you get more training? Are you sure?

Modern: (*addressing the audience*) Who's in charge here? The student or the teacher? The By-Laws or the Spirit? How does faith take root? With careful definitions of orthodoxy, or with wide-open welcome? Is one complete without the other?

And last but not least, will the beloved community accept him, when he tells them he is now one of them?

Narrator: And both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

Spirit: You, my child, now belong to me!

Ethiopian: He walked right into the pond with me, and when we were in up to our waists, he bent me backwards and dunked me completely. He spoke the name that I had not heard since my mother held me in her lap. I'll never forget the feel of that fragrant, cool water running down my face, and the sunlight glinting through the drops of water that fell from my hair as I emerged. It felt like the first day of my life.

Narrator: When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. \

(Philip and Ethiopian exit—P offstage, and E through doorway. Modern remains on stage)

Modern: One went one way and one went another, and they never met again. But neither of them ever forgot what happened on the wilderness road, that hot day.

Philip: (*re-emerging in aisle*) I learned to listen and to ask questions, before I started giving answers. I came to trust that Jesus could lead me to find common ground with anyone, anywhere...

I realized that I was still seeking and learning too. The Spirit had many more surprises for me.

Modern: Where did they go from there? What was the next unexpected friendship? The next holy moment? The next stretching of their souls, on a wilderness road..... or a city corner?

Narrator: *And Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea .*

Spirit: The End.
The Beginning.
To be continued....
Get up and go. Amen.

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Meet Us Here, At the Edge

Text © Martha B. Peck 2013

Music © Kathy Wonson Eddy, 2013

V. 1&2: Isaiah 40: 3-9, 27-31

V. 3: Acts 8: 27-39

V. 6 Genesis 1: 26-31

G Bm Cmaj7 Em D C

Meet us here, at the edge, Je - sus be with us.

9 Em Bm Em Am7(add9) Cmaj7 Am7(add9) G9

Meet us here, at the edge, Je - sus be with us.

18 Em C Am Em Em

1. Long - ings beck - on, fear draws back In the dance of faith and doubt.
 2. Fail - ures fill the world with gray, Bleak the mid - night, then comes dawn.
 3. Place where wa - ter meets the land, Marsh - y bound' ry, shift - ing sand.
 4. O - pen doors say "Wel - come here" Church - es al - so o - pen out!"

26 G C Am C D

As love's cour - age makes us bold, We step off the well - worn track.
 Wake to won - der: High pink clouds, Sing - ing birds an - nounce, "New day!"
 Stran - gers share their deep - est truths, O - ver - lap - ping voi - ces speak.
 Mis - sion's wide im - per - a - tive, Send - ing us where neigh - bors live.

35 G Bm Cmaj7 Em D C

Meet us here, at the edge, Je - sus dare with us.
 Meet us here, at the edge, Je - sus dream with us.
 Meet us here, at the edge, Je - sus bap - tize us.
 Meet us here, at the edge, Je - sus serve with us.

43 Em Bm Em Am⁷(add9) C^{maj7} Am⁷ G⁹

Meet us here, at the edge, _____ Je- sus dare_ with us.
 Meet us here, at the edge, _____ Je- sus dream with us.
 Meet us here, at the edge, _____ Je - sus bap - tize us.
 Meet us here, at the edge, _____ Je - sus serve with us.

5. Efforts spent, our empty hands
 Folded, rest and then recall
 Even empty hands can bless,
 Touch, enfold, reach out, caress
 Meet us here, at the edge, Jesus go with us
 Meet us here, at the edge, Jesus go with us.

6. Texts and tongues, technology
 Carry blessings ancient, new
 Let earth's varied voices name
 what is lovely real and true.
 Meet us here, at the edge, Jesus change with us.
 Meet us here, at the edge, Jesus change with us

Friends of the Vermont Conference

The Vermont Conference stands in mutual covenant with 140 churches, eight associations and the national setting of the United Church of Christ. Since 1795, the Conference has sought to equip, train, and support its members to do mission and ministry locally and globally.

Your Conference relies on a variety of income streams to carry its ministry to our 140 churches. Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM), Per Capita, and the invested funds interest and dividends provide the majority of the needed income. However, after we have trimmed all we can (and in some cases we would say really more than we should trim), there is still a shortfall.

Thus the creation of the **Friends of the Vermont Conference**. The Friends is a way for individuals and churches to donate directly to the ongoing work of the Conference. 100% of the contributions stay in Vermont to help fund those programs, missions and ministries that touch and change lives throughout our beautiful state.



In 2012, 131 folks contributed just under \$20,000 to the Friends.

We are asking for each local Congregation to receive a special offering or hold a special fund raising event with the proceeds being donated to the **Friends of the Vermont Conference**. We would like this to happen on/or before Sunday, June 2nd, which will be designated as **Vermont Conference Sunday**, in conjunction with our Vermont Conference Annual Meeting.

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Ministries supported by **Friends of the Vermont Conference** include:

- Disaster Relief/Support
- Camp Agape
- Covenant Hills



- Camping Scholarships
- Pastors Convocation
- Continuing Education Events

- Vermont Congregational Home (Newbury)
- Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council (VLIAC)
- Summer Lunch Program Grants
- Stewardship Assistance
- Church Vitality
- Retreat Leadership
- Conference Events
- *And more!*



Donations are tax deductible.

Please accept my donation of: \$ _____.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email Address _____

Local Church _____

Please return to: Friends of the Vermont Conference, UCC, 36 N. Main St., Randolph, VT 05060 or donate online at: www.vtcucc.org.

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