

**Canada, Worship in the United  
Church of**

The United Church of Canada was formed in

1925 from the union of Canadian \*Methodists, \*Congregationalists, 70% of \*Presbyterians and a number of 'union' congregations, making it the first union of its kind in the world. Others joined later, including Wesleyan Methodists of Bermuda (1930), Evangelical United Brethren (1968) and numerous congregations from other communions. The 'Basis of Union' states that 'the freedom of worship . . . in the negotiating Churches shall not be interfered with ...' There are no prescribed liturgies with the exception of part of the \*ordination rite. While authority for worship resides in the congregation, resources are produced at the national level to support and reform worship. Such material is both a response to and source of developing practices.

Sunday worship in the founding traditions consisted primarily of preaching services with, at most, quarterly communion. *Forms of Service for the Offices of the Church* (1926) included orders for sacraments and occasional services drawn from the uniting denominations. *The Hymnary of The United Church of Canada* (1930) and *The Book of Common Order of the United Church of Canada* (1932) shifted the focus from denominational particularity to greater catholicity. The legacy of the *Hymnary* was its gospel and children's hymns, social gospel texts, prose psalms and select pieces of service music. *The Book of Common Order* defined the ethos of United Church worship as 'ordered liberty', an effort to embrace both 'the experience of many ages of devotion' and 'the leading of the Spirit'. In the tradition of John Knox's service books, United Church worship is a synthesis of 'prayer book' and 'directory' in which orders of service offer models of structure and content.

The 'First Directory for Public Worship' in *The Book of Common Order* was a hybrid of Anglican \*daily prayer and the *Westminster Directory* with the sermon as the climax. The 'Second Directory' offered the \*eucharistic pattern as normative. Orders for the Lord's supper suggest influence of the Church of England's *Prayer Book as Proposed in 1928*. *BCP* material dominates the language of \*baptism, 'confirmation', \*marriage, \*funeral and ordination rites. The first woman was ordained in 1938. The 'Treasury of Prayers' was a favourite section, while the 'Table of Lessons' with seasonal \*collects was seldom used.

As the stability of the 1950s gave way to the turmoil of the 1960s, calls for the revision of *The Book of Common Order* gathered around

issues of \*language, theology and liturgical experimentation. This was complicated by the early stages of the ecumenical \*Liturgical Movement and union negotiations with the Anglican Church of Canada. *Service Book for the Use of Ministers Conducting Public Worship* (1969) asserted the principle of the 'unity of word and sacrament', placing the order for the Lord's supper first and basing those of initiation, public worship and occasional services on it. 'Contemporary' orders accompanied many of the rites. An emerging consciousness of \*lectionary and calendar is evident in the rubrics and 'Table of Lessons'. Unison prayers and litanies and the responsive Psalms in the *Service Book for the use of the people* (1969) point to more active congregational participation.

*The Hymn Book of the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada* (1971) was produced with the Anglicans in anticipation of a union which was never consummated. While its organization owed much to *Service Book*, its sophisticated musical sensibilities and the loss of gospel hymns alienated many United Church persons. Nevertheless, it supported growing calendar observance and contributed new texts and tunes to United Church hymnody. Equally significant during this period was the emergence of liturgical periodicals, one descendant of which, *Gathering*, continues. *Service Book*, *Hymn Book* and *Gathering* helped prepare the way for some of the features of ecumenical liturgical convergence.

The 1980s saw the publication of a series of booklets 'for optional use' which introduced the resources of liturgical convergence to United Church worship. *A Sunday Liturgy* (1984), *The Celebration of Marriage* (1985), *Baptism and Renewal of Baptismal Faith* (1986), *Services for Death and Burial* (1987), *Pastoral Liturgies and Prayers for Special Occasions* (1990) grew out of a vision of the 'word-and-table' shape of worship, renewed attention to Christian initiation and a greater awareness of the language of symbol and sacrament. Common lectionary and calendar became widely accepted with the introduction of the lectionary-based Christian educational curriculum, *Whole People of God*. \*Inclusive language, lay leadership and 'inter-generational worship' has become more mainstream. White albs, seasonal stoles and architectural renovations are common. *Songs for a Gospel People* (Winfield 1987), a western

Canada initiative to supplement *Hymn Book*, was an instant best-seller and important precursor to the next generation of resources.

The new hymn book, *Voices United (1996)*, filters the musical resources of liturgical convergence through a United Church lens. Its popular success suggests a significant impact on United Church worship. It is marked by a breadth of classic and contemporary texts and tunes, a variety of musical and cultural styles and diverse local and global contributions. Service music from Russia to Iona supports increasing sacramentality in United Church worship. The structure of the book is calendar-based and lectionary-indexed. Resources for prayer model orthodox and radical theologies. Inclusive language is the norm, balance is the goal, diversity is the result.

The latest service book is *Celebrate God's Presence (2000)*. Nearly every section contains noteworthy if not controversial innovations. 'General' and 'seasonal' resources can be adapted to any order of service, though a word-and-table structure set within the Christian calendar is presupposed. \*Eucharistic prayers range from that attributed to Hippolytus to those reflecting feminist Christologies and resources for original compositions. Services of initiation provide options for promises and blessings in inclusive language. Orders for 'Marriage and Life Partnership' permit same-sex covenants. Funeral materials include prayers for 'When a pregnancy is terminated' and 'On the death of a pet'. The second half of the book is given to pastoral occasions, including seasonal prayers beyond the scope of the traditional liturgical calendar, orders for the blessing of homes, fields, fisheries and animals, as well as ritual resources for 'healing,' 'closure' and daily prayer. *Celebrate God's Presence* is perhaps the first effort at a post-modern liturgical style that is post-ecumenical convergence. Notable, finally, is its title and several chapter headings, taken from the United Church's 'A New Creed'. Introduced in 1968, it is now widely used as an affirmation of faith and is increasingly definitive of United Church worship and theology.

Each generation of United Church worship resources reflects and contributes to the dialectic of order and liberty that is its liturgical ethos. Liturgical freedom continues to be prized; regional, theological and stylistic diversity persist; ecumenism, liberalism and activism converge. From the contributions of the founding traditions to the catholicity of an increas-

ingly established church, the experimentation of the 1960s, the ecumenical convergence of the 1980s and the postmodernity of the turn of the millennium, worship in the United Church continues to strive for both the ordered wisdom of the 'many ages of devotion' and the freeing liberty of 'the leading of the Spirit'.

Alan Barthel, David R. Newman, Paul Scott Wilson (eds), *A Guide to Sunday Worship in The United Church of Canada*, Toronto 1988; Thomas Harding, 'Ordered Liberty: Sunday Worship in the United Church of Canada', *The Sunday Service of the Methodists: Twentieth-Century Worship in Worldwide Methodism*, ed. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, Nashville, TN 1996, 95-116; Thomas Harding, *Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Worship in Canada Prior to 1925*, Toronto 1995 (bib.); Thomas Harding and Bruce Harding, *Patterns of Worship in The United Church of Canada 1925-1987*, Toronto 1996 (bib.).

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