

I used the following “Toward 2035” resources as a guide:

Toward 2035 Congregational Conversation Facilitator's Guide

Toward 2035 - Congregational Conversation Presentation

After reading through the above resources, the following themes were pulled out and used for a 4-week worship theme: 1) A Watershed Moment, 2) Is Decline the Whole Story?, 3) Seven Ways to Grow and Thrive, and 4) Inspired, Resilient, and Diverse

It's helpful to read through the Facilitator's Guide. Themes, quotes, and ideas from this resource were used extensively throughout the four weeks of worship.

Week 1: Towards 2035: A Watershed Moment

Hymn Suggestions:

#12MV Come Touch Our Hearts

#207VU Spirit of God, Unleashed on Earth

#625VU I Feel the Winds of God

MV#212 Sent Out in Jesus' Name (Sung Blessing)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-8, 12-21, 37-42

(The Pentecost reading is seen as a “watershed moment” in Christianity.)

Sermon: Watershed Moment

This series began on Pentecost Sunday, but this reading can be used on any Sunday to convey a watershed moment in Christianity. In the facilitator's resource, the current moment is seen as a watershed moment or a pivotal moment in the church, although watershed moment can only ever be seen in hindsight. Slides from the Toward 2035 presentation were used to show how much decline there has been since 1992 to 2023, and a projection for 2035. It's important to emphasize that the 2035 numbers are only a projection if the church chooses the status quo. *“This is a time when we need to be open to the Spirit, letting go of assumptions, being open to a new direction, and listening to what the world needs of us. What will be our fire, our spark, as a United Church, and as a community of faith, here in (name community)? What will drive us forward, inspired and impassioned to spread the word of God's justice and peace?”*¹

A Prayer for Communities of Faith (included in the Toward 2035 resources)

**Gracious and loving God, you called into being
this United Church of Canada,
one expression of Jesus' beloved community,
here in the particularities of our place and our time.
For the past 100 years, you have guided and sustained
and called us back when we have erred.
Now, as we look back, we also look forward,**

¹ Words in Italics are lifted from the author's sermons.

**daring to believe that even among us,
even in this very place, you are doing a new thing.
We long to perceive it, like a way through a wilderness,
for the sake of our neighbours,
for the sake of this world of beautiful and broken things,
yearning to be made whole, yearning to be made new.
May we perceive and live into it. Amen.**

Benediction

We leave this time of worship with open hearts and minds.
We go forward with the Spirit's wisdom and guidance.
May the Spirit light a fire over each one of us,
inspiring us to go out, with the love God within,
sharing that love with the world. Amen.

Week 2: Towards 2035: Is Decline the Whole Story?

Hymn Suggestions:

#4MV All Who Are Thirsty

#507VU Today We All Are Called to be Disciples

#150VU Spirit God, Be Our Breath

MV#212 Sent Out in Jesus' Name (Sung Blessing)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 54:1-8 (The Inclusive Bible)

Sermon: Is Decline the Whole Story?

On this Sunday, you might share the General Council's 10 year strategic plan and ask what the strategic plan might be for your community of faith, towards 2035. There are more slides from the Toward 2035 presentation that offer hope of growth and optimism for the future.

From the Isaiah passage, we read, "Enlarge your tent, stretch out your hangings, lengthen your ropes and strengthen your stakes!" In this passage, we are reminded that we need to stretch, and lengthen, and broaden, *"whether it be our minds, our hearts, our faith, the mission of our faith communities. Everything feels like it is being stretched right now. Sometimes, things will snap and we will have to start from scratch. Other times, the stretching will settle and become the new norm."*

A Prayer for Communities of Faith (These words were said in unison each Sunday.)

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Benediction

May you be assured and comforted, may you be stretched and pulled, and may you gather in love. God is in our midst. May you always feel that and know that you are loved and treasured. Amen.

Week 3: Toward 2035: Seven Ways To Grow and Thrive

Hymn Suggestions:

#603VU In Loving Partnership We Come

#12MV Come Touch Our Hearts

#402VU We Are One

MV#212 Sent Out in Jesus' Name

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 (The Inclusive Bible)

Sermon: Seven Ways to Grow and Thrive

In our reading, the Thessalonians are being offered a list of ways to live as a new community of Christ. Our society is filled with lists of ways to improve our bodies, our minds, our relationships, our pocketbooks, and so much more. The United Church, in its Toward 2035 resources offers such a list to communities of faith, a list that might support growth and renewal. Share this list, found in the Toward 2035 facilitator's resource, with the community of faith

A Prayer for Communities of Faith (These words were said in unison each Sunday.)

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**for the sake of this world of beautiful and broken things,
yearning to be made whole, yearning to be made new.
May we perceive and live into it. Amen.**

Benediction

Go from this place, connecting, inviting, reflecting, but especially listening and praying. May God be our support. May Christ be our guide. May the Spirit fill us with inspiration. May it be so. Amen.

Week 4: Towards 2035: Inspired, Resilient, and Diverse

Hymn Suggestions:

#23TLUS For Everyone Born

#178MV Who Is My Mother?

#595VU We Are Pilgrims

MV#212 Sent Out in Jesus' Name

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16 (The Inclusive Bible)

15 Rather, let us speak the truth in love, and grow to the full maturity of Christ, the head.

16 Through Christ, the whole body grows. With the proper functioning of each member, firmly joined together by each supporting ligament, the body builds itself up in love.

Sermon: Inspired, Resilient, and Diverse

(This works well at a time when you are celebrating Diversity, for example, Pride Sunday.)

"In order to thrive in our current context, we need to be Inspired, Resilient, and Diverse. Might the space we create be a space that inspires, where people want to come and join in its mission and be a part of the work? Might this be a space that can be resilient, weathering the ups and downs of our economy, politics, contextual change? Might this be a space of diversity, one where all can enter and feel safe, warm, welcomed, and where they might feel they can belong?"

Share a vision of the future of your community of faith. Share an inspired vision that is resilient and diverse. Encourage your community of faith to explore what this looks like for them.

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Benediction

As we leave from this place, and as we explore the impact we might make on this community, may we be inspired, may we be resilient, and may we be diverse. May God, the creator, Christ, our teacher, and the Spirit, our cheerleader, guide us, give us patience and wisdom, and love us every imperfect step of the way. Amen.