# General Council 44 Opening Worship

A video of the constitution of General Council 44 will be on [the United Church YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/user/unitedchurchofcanada) on or after February 13, 2022. GC44 worship resources are available in *French* on [EgliseUnie.ca](https://egliseunie.ca/le-travail-du-cg44/).

## Call to Worship

(Consider having people from each of the geographical areas responding to the Call to Worship by saying their own names for Jesus or using some of the ones provided below (in italics). If in a sanctuary, people can be physically positioned in the different directions. If online, people can share based on their geographical location.)

People of the East,
where the dawn is greeted as it rises from the eastern ocean,
where on our crest the burning bush is still aflame but is not consumed,
we call you to join us in the worship of God.
**In the East, God calls us and we are coming.**Awe-Inspiring. Brother. Emmanuel.

People of the South,
where forest and field meet steel and concrete,
where on our crest the Alpha and Omega dwell,
we call you to join us in the worship of God.
**In the South, God calls us and we are coming.**Compass. Friend. Gatekeeper.

People of the West,
where the mountains rise to the skies and the prairie stretches to the horizon,
where on our crest the Bible is open for all to experience,
we call you to join us in the worship of God. **In the West, God calls us and we are coming.**God’s Heart. Holy. Incarnate. Love.

People of the North,
where the land is vast and blessed with water,
where on our crest the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove,
we call you to join us in the worship of God.
**In the North, God calls us and we are coming.**La Parole (de Dieu). La Lumière (du monde). La Joie (que me fait vivre).

People of God, gathered around the table of God,
we come from all the directions with Christ at the Centre,
where on the crest the letter chi brings everything together,
where all of Creation intersects, where all are one.
We call you to join us in the worship of God.
**From the Centre, God calls us and we are coming.**Teacher. Mentor. Rabbi. Redeemer.

## Hymn

MV 28 God of the Bible

## Opening Prayer

God of Mercy,
guide us one and all toward the feast of joy prepared for all people,
from the north, the west, the south, and the east,
those who are here and those who join us in spirit,
and with all who await the joy of your presence in Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.

## Exploring the Word

The theme for General Council this year is “Who Do You Say I Am?” coming from the gospel story where Jesus asks his disciples this question. Invite people within your community to respond to the questions:

* If Jesus asked you, “Who do you say I am?” how would you respond today?
* Has your answer to Jesus’ question changed through the years? If so, how?

Share a few of these testimonials during worship and encourage those who are tech-savvy to share a short video response with the hashtag **#UCCanGC44** to connect with other United Church worshippers. Use this hashtag to find other video testimonials.

## Hymn

MV 12 Come Touch Our Hearts
MV 62 There Is Room for All
VU 670 Precious Lord, Take My Hand

## Scripture

Mark 8:27‒30 Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”

## Sermon Ideas

### The Work of General Council

Have a General Council commissioner or former commissioner speak about their experience at General Council, how the work of the council impacts the work of the church, and how that works testifies to their understanding of who Jesus is.

If you do not have a commissioner or former commissioner in your community, speak to the [structure of The United Church of Canada](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/organization-and-governance/congregations-and-councils-united-church) and of the [General Council Office](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/organization-and-governance/general-council-office-structure). Reflect on how your community of faith supports the work of the entire church. How do our actions testify to who we believe Jesus to be?

or

### Examining Power and Privilege

At the last General Council a conversation continued about the [voices of privilege within the church](https://youtu.be/ieLx94ZIv1w). Have a conversation about anti-racism in church settings and the impact that unexamined power has on our work as followers of Jesus. For further resources and inspiration on anti-racism within the church read the blog [“Cherishing & Celebrating Racial Differences”](https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/cherishing-celebrating-racial-differences) or look at resources in the [Lent Easter 2022 issue of *Gathering*](https://united-church.ca/worship-liturgical-season/ash-wednesday).

## Prayer of Reconciliation

Holy Creator,
the last time our General Council met in person, in community,
we finally gave agenda airtime
 and space at microphones
for stories of race and assumed privilege.

For the unending catalogue of instances and experiences
 of being “othered,” diminished, and dismissed,
we confess our complicity and seek forgiveness.

In the time since we last met,
we have been reminded of racism’s deadly toll on the lives of its victims,
 on the spiritual, mental, and physical health of survivors,
 and of the effects rendered upon family members and friends.

Whether we name it Islamophobia or antisemitism,
 or anti-Black racism or anti-Asian hatred in society,
 or colonialism in residential schools,
 or White supremacy lodged in systemic hierarchies,
 or personal prejudices enacted in microaggressions,
we all suffer.

We are the lesser for the disconnection imposed upon us by
misleading mythologies and stories of the sinister other.

We grieve the loss of connections,
 of possibility,
 of mutuality,
 of relationship.

We are grateful that the narrative of racial identity has become more complicated because that means it is becoming more true, more genuine.

Bless our ongoing struggle and work, as we press on,
ever more determined to make a difference,
to be a church of change,
finding salvation that saves us from our own undoing.

We pray in silence the prayers of our hearts…
Amen.

## Hymn

MV 85 Take O Take Me as I Am

## Offering

## Dedication Hymn

VU 575 I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

(*You may wish to have communion at this point in the service; see* [*Worship Resources for Congregations*](https://generalcouncil44.ca/community/worship-resources-congregations) *for the Feb 13 Opening Communion Liturgy.*)

## Prayers of the People

O God of many names,
From sea to sea to sea we come,
each with different needs,
 different prayers,
 different worries,
 different lives,
 different languages,
 different cultures,
 different experiences

And yet, we are connected as One Body,
 yours,
 as The United Church of Canada.

Our prayers are as diverse as our members,
 and yet you receive each one,
 and in your creative mercy you respond
 whether we understand the response or not.

We pray for the world,
 with its climate changed,
 with its struggles for equality, equity, and justice,
 with unbalanced access to food and water,
 with its unjust distribution and access to vaccines,

We pray for all people,
 for our grief,
 for our addictions,
 for our joys and our struggles,
 as we all strive to be the best we can be.

We pray for our gathering,
 that we may seek the gifts of the Spirit,
 that we may be fully attentive,
 that we honour one another’s truth,
 as we discern our present and our future.

May your Spirit lead us in faith and fun.

We know that we must strive
to live into the truth
 of who we know you to be
 and who you call us to be.

In the names of the One who calls,
 who loves,
 who knows,
 and who names us.
Amen.

## Hymn

MV 140 As Long as We Follow

## Benediction

Be brave, beloved.

May you enter, free-fall, into the blessing of the three times Holy.
As you fall, call out the Name,
then listen
as the warm, dark silence echoes it back to you
in your own cradle tongue,
the sound
shattered, refracted, into a rainbow of names
that call forth a sigh of recognition,
a groan, a glimmer, a magnificent magnificat,
nameless and naming and named.

Be bold, beloved.
With Hagar, name the One who knows you.
With Moses, accept the Name in the fire that does not destroy.
With the disciples, take the Question and bear it, its blessing and its cost.
Who do YOU say that I am?

Be bolder, braver yet, beloved, and receive this blessing:
the blessing of the naming of evil.
Left unnamed, it names us. Tells us who we are, and what we’re worth.
Name the evil. Call out to it that there is a name stronger, more expansive, and free
before which there is no other.

Be blessed, beloved.
Be blessed to be a blessing.
Together, connected in the name of Love,
wade through the river. We are hip deep in glory,
awash in hope.

Be bold, be brave, be blessed.

This worship liturgy is by the *GC44 Worship Planning Team* and prepared for congregational use by [Gathering](https://gatheringworship.ca/).

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