

# All you need is love

Honoring the Diversity of Women's Voices in Theology



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Permission is given to reprint and use these resources for worship.

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# Introduction

In February 2014, Mennonite Church USA's Women in Leadership Project hosted its first national conference, titled *All You Need is Love: Honoring the diversity of women's voices in theology*. These resources for worship are based on the actual worship services prepared for that gathering and have been minimally adapted for wider use.

*All You Need is Love* joined a larger tradition of Anabaptist theologians, ministers and lay people coming together to do theological work born out of women's experiences. The gathering reflected on what it means to love in the midst of a world rife with struggle and oppression and intended to create space where participants could face certain realities head on: tensions between women of greater and lesser privilege, the need to listen deeply to a wide variety of women's voices in matters of faith and theology, the difficulty of putting love into action, and the need to stand in solidarity with struggling sisters in our local communities and around the world. It drew attention to the Spirit of God living in the stories of those gathered and in the stories of sisters near and far.

Because the conference was saturated with opportunities to engage intellectually, worship was created as a space in which participants were encouraged to engage physically, spiritually and expressively. The services are constructed from song, dance, breath, drama, silence, poetry and ritual.

## How to use these resources

Each of the five services is designed as a complete service. Text in italics is intended as instruction to worship leaders, and regular text is intended to be spoken. Each service includes suggestions for visuals and sections titled Entering the Space, Dwelling, Singing, and Sending. Select services also include a Responsive Reading, Biblical Storytelling, Ritual, Body Prayer and/or Silence. Also included in this set of resources is a Love Feast, which can be celebrated as an element of any of the five services. These services are appropriate for small groups and may also be adapted for use in the context of congregational worship. As you use these resources, you are encouraged to customize the elements to make them meaningful and appropriate for your community.

You will notice that the services do not include at least three elements that are found in most congregational worship settings: a reading from the biblical text, formal prayer and a sermon. Suggested readings from the biblical text are not included because biblical references and stories are woven through the other elements of the services. If you would like to include a more formal biblical reading, consider choosing a passage referenced in the service.

Prayers spoken to God on behalf of the community are not included because each service is intended to be a prayer in itself, from beginning to end. As Janet Treviño-Elizarraraz, a participant in *All You Need is Love*, observed, "The absence of prayer in which one person audibly addressed God on behalf of the community was appropriate because of the incarnational quality of the gathering. ... We prayed in being present, listening, allowing the Spirit to move our words, our songs, our bodies. ... God was within us—our lives were a living prayer."

The services do not suggest a place for a sermon because they are focused on engaging the body and spirit, trusting that cerebral engagement will come from a different source.

Music plays a significant role in these services. You are encouraged to add instrumental accompaniment as often as possible—to songs, poems, readings, etc. Percussion was especially meaningful during *All You Need is Love*. Explore the possibility of incorporating drums, tambourines, bells, wood blocks or xylophone. Any other instrumental accompaniment you have access to may be valuable as well.

Two of the songs central to the series are not found in Mennonite hymnals. They are simple to learn, and it is well worth your while to teach them to those gathered to worship:

- I found God in myself (see p. 27)
- Walk into the holy fire (see p. 27)



# Creating safer space together

*Due to the vulnerable nature of the conversations at All You Need is Love, the opening worship was followed by sharing what it means to create 'safer space' together. Participants were asked to read the text printed below and then reflect on what it would mean for each person to commit to making the gathering as safe as it could be.*

*Consider using this text in some way as you begin this worship series. It could be printed and distributed to worshipers before the series begins. It could be modified and read during the first service. Or, it could be a reference for worship leaders who construct safer space during the series. Use this in a way that suits your needs.*

We hope this time we have to worship together will be spent learning, reflecting, relaxing, acting, building and strengthening relationships, and having fun. Together, we will be focusing on what it means to love in the midst of a world rife with struggle and oppression, and we will strive to face these realities head on: tensions between women of greater and lesser privilege, the need to listen deeply to a wide variety of women's voices in matters of faith and theology, the difficulty of putting love into action, and the need to stand in solidarity with struggling sisters in our local communities and around the world.

Likely, in addition to having a good time together, we will also be sharing and receiving stories that might be difficult to hold. As listeners and speakers, we may find ourselves nudged into positions of vulnerability, which means that it is important that the space we create together be a space of safety and respect.

We recognize that we cannot guarantee safe space. What we *can* do is commit ourselves to crafting a safer space. As worship planners, we commit ourselves to not doing violence by our words or by our deeds. If and when we make mistakes, we ask that it be brought to our attention. We will do our best to make it right.

We ask that you do the same: to commit yourselves to not doing violence by word or by deed.

We have thought about things like inclusive language and space for all kinds of people. We recognize that all of us are on a journey and that we are at different places on the journey. We recognize that we come from a number of different contexts and have different lived experiences. We recognize that as we gather for this time of worship, we come from a spectrum of theological, political and economic convictions.

There are likely to be many points in which we do not agree with one another. But we would like to hold all of who we are and what we bring together in this place in a community of mutual discernment and caring for one another.

Please join in the commitment to each do our part to make this space as safe as it can be for all who are gathered.



## Service 1: Naming, centering, inviting

### VISUALS

*Throughout this series, beads will be used as visuals and as elements of the services. Prepare a table at the front or center of the room with an empty, transparent vase. Have large beads on hand—the more colorful and visually varied, the better. The beads will be put into the vase during the responsive reading, and this will serve as the visual for this service. Surround the vase with few lit candles to represent God's presence. You may want to cover the table with colorful cloth to represent the beauty and diversity of those who will be named as a part of the service.*

### ENTERING THE SPACE

*As the community gathers, let there be drumming or music of another kind that sets the tone. At the end of the drumming or music, chime a bell and allow for a moment of silence to summon the attention of those gathered.*

Welcome to this space.

Right now this space is a room in a building full of rooms, in a town full of many more rooms.

But when we enter this room, we are going to change it into more than just a meeting space.

We are going to turn it into a gathering space, a dwelling, a place of comfort.

We will fill this space with words—words of love, words of diversity, words of dignity and healing and hope.

### SINGING

*Sing the Journey #18: Over my head*

### ENTERING THE SPACE (continued)

We will fill this space with words—words of love, words of diversity, words of dignity and healing and hope. The irony of creating a place of comfort, however, is that it is not always comfortable. This space might stretch or be new for each of us at different times. We will need to name that newness out loud, for the creation of a safe space requires voicing our discomfort.

We will hear words calling the Holy by different names than we might be used to ... Christa, Sophia, Heavenly Mother.

We are going to put words to things, to emotions, to situations that we have too often not spoken out loud—because we are Mennonite, because we are women, because we are not the leaders, because we don't have the votes.

For some, these words will be welcome, and for some they may be jarring, but we are committed to voicing them and our reactions to them.

Because this whole conference will be full of words, we heed a famous flower seller who once said, “Words, words, words, I’m so sick of words. I get words all day through, first from him, then from you. Is that all you blighters can do?”

So, we will also fill this space with music. We will fill this space with movement. We will fill this space with silence.

And we call on the Holy Spirit to come to us, to fill the spaces in between our words, in between our movement, in between our silence, so that we may dwell in love together.

## SINGING

*Sing the Journey #33: Come Holy Spirit*

*Sing the Journey #34: Loving Spirit*

*I found God in myself (see p. 27)*

## RESPONSIVE READING

*As each biblical character is named during the reading, place a bead in the jar to represent her presence and influence. If possible, find out the first names of each person who will be present at the service and make a list of them ahead of time. (If there is more than one person present with the same first name, write this name down only once.)*

*Near the end of the reading, read this list. As each name is spoken, add a bead to the jar to represent the presence and influence of that person. Invite each person present to stand when her (or his) name is called.*

You may have noticed this empty vase before us. This vase is like the space in which we’ve gathered. Before we came, it was empty. Now that we are together here, it is filling up with the shapes and colors of our identities, of our spirits, of our love.

These beads represent the diversity that each one of us contributes to this space. Each one is made differently from all the others. In many cultures around the world, beads take on the shape of the culture they come from, and they communicate something of that culture’s story.

While the beads are individually distinct, they are also intended to be joined via string, and together they create a work of beauty that is more than the sum of its parts. In the same way, when we join ourselves to one another in this space, we become more than the sum of our parts. We become sisters, daughters of God. And when we join ourselves with our sisters of the past who have paved our way, we become the body of Christa.

Leader: Come.

Group 1: Come, Beloved.

Group 2: Come, be anointed.

Leader: Give us the mourners:

Group 1: Rachel, who weeps for her children;  
Tamar, the daughter of David;

Group 2: Naomi, who buried her family in a strange land;  
Martha, who cries for her brother.

Leader: Give us the survivors:

Group 1: Hagar, mother of a civilization;  
Dinah, sister to Jacob's sons;

Group 2: Vashti, who fell out of the king's favor;  
Bathsheba, who fell into a king's favor.

Leader: Give us the wicked:

Group 1: Lilith, who left the Garden;  
Delilah, loved by Samson;

Group 2: Gomer, purchased by Hosea;  
Salome, who danced for Herod.

Leader: Give us the saints:

Group 1: Hannah, the mother of Samuel;  
Mary, the sister of Martha;

Group 2: Anna, the Prophetess;  
Mary, the mother of God;

Leader: Give us the unnamed:

Group 1: The Levite's concubine;  
the woman at the well;

Group 2: the woman possessed;  
the woman at Jesus' feet.

Leader: We will take these women unto ourselves, comforting the mourning and drying their tears. We will heal the abused and bring them wholeness; we will gather the saints and the wicked together and let them be as one woman; we will name the unnamed and give voice to their stories.

Women: For though we are none of these women, we are all of these women.

Leader: No woman is only her tears, no woman is only her body, no woman is only her sexuality and no woman is only her goodness. We are all mourners, all survivors, all saints, all sinners. And we shall be named as Daughters of YHWH. We are ... *[call out the first names of all women present, and invite them to stand, placing a bead in the jar after each name]*. And the brothers present with us are ... *[call out the first names of all men present, and invite them to stand]*.

All: Let the Holy Spirit come to us and through us, binding the parts of us together with love, binding each of us to the other with love, and making us whole.

## SINGING

*I found God in myself (see p. 27)*

*Sing the Journey #38: Beloved, God's chosen*

*Walk into the holy fire (see p. 27)*

*For the song Walk into the holy fire, invite a dancer to dance (perhaps with scarves) in the center of the worship space to the music. Have additional scarves available and invite others to dance with her or in other areas of the room if they feel so moved. This song is especially enhanced by percussion.*

## DWELLING

We have been called into this time of worship by name;  
our names read aloud,  
our presence announced.  
We invite one and all to be centered in this space.

Let this be a grounded space.  
Let this be a place you can call home for the time being.

What is your center?  
The center should be a place without fear;  
a place where you are known;  
a place where you are grounded;  
a place where you can gain strength and power;  
perhaps a place where you can rest in that power.

It is your home.

The center, after all, is the place where things happen.  
We name centers in order to let people know—this is where it's at.

By its very nature, the center suggests the margins.

And I would also invite us to think about the center as a place where we cannot stay.

I would like to suggest that it is the work of de-centering that moves us forward.

Step to the center;  
move toward the margins.

## SILENCE

*Chime a bell to initiate a time of silence.*

## SINGING

*Walk into the holy fire (see p. 27)*

## SENDING

Go with the assurance that you are loved.





## Service 2: The Holy Spirit

### VISUALS

*The jar that was filled with beads at the last service will serve as the central visual. Following the Dwelling section, the jar will be filled with water to represent the Holy Spirit filling the space among all those gathered to worship.*

### SINGING

*Sing the Journey #115: Yonder come day*

### ENTERING THE SPACE

- Voice 1: Here is an invitation to the thirsty,  
wherever they may be found.
- Voice 2: Come, all you who are thirsty  
and you who have no money;  
come, buy and eat.
- Voice 1: Why spend money on what is not bread?  
And your labor on what does not satisfy?
- Voices 1 & 2: Come, come to the waters.
- Voice 2: At the dawn of creation God spoke,  
and it was so: "Let there be light."  
The wind from God swept over the face of the waters,  
and God said it was good
- ALL: Come to the waters.
- Voice 1: Blessed is the one who delights in the law of the Lord.  
They are like trees planted by the water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.
- ALL: Come to the waters.
- Voice 2: The earth is the Lord's  
and all that is within it;  
God has founded it on the seas  
and established it on the rivers
- ALL: Come to the waters.

## SINGING

*Sing the Journey #79: As I went down to the river*

*Sing the Journey #49: Rain down*

## DWELLING

For those of you who are early risers, one of the things I hear that you enjoy about the morning is that sense that you are participating in the world waking up—that movement into light from night, into awareness from sleepiness, into motion from rest.

All over the world, in all of our homes and in all of our communities, there is a quickening to the day that begins with the simple movements of morning. Water being drawn; the long walk to school or to the fields or the factory begun; the first breath to put sound to the first word spoken to the first person of the day.

Think of the movement of water: Rebekah drawing water for Jacob's servant; the Moabite woman drawing water for Jesus. The dropping of the bucket into the well, the gathering of the rope, the pouring into the cup.

Think of the movement of breath and air. God's breath hovering over the waters, the eagle's wings fluttering over her young. The taking in of the Holy, the pause to let it fill your body, the exhale that releases the tension.

Think of the movement of the body: Miriam dancing at the Red Sea, Mary running to the disciples. The tightening and relaxing of the muscles, the heart beating in time to your footsteps, the warmth that seeps into your skin.

Think of the Holy Spirit as She moves here within us, creating this space as a holy space, creating these bodies as holy bodies, creating this community as a holy community. Feel her gather us together, feel her breathe over us, feel her warmth on our being.

For She has brought us to dwell with each other here in love.

*Prepare to pour water into the vase holding the beads. Consider adding drumming as the next section is read and as the water is poured.*

In our last service, we named every person present here and a collection of women of the past. We named the human spirits and identities that make up this space and influence its shape and feel. Now we name the divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit, which shares this place with us [*begin pouring the water into the vase*], filling the gaps between our bodies, between our experiences, between our minds, between our spirits. The Holy Spirit is like water that gives us life, water that holds us together. The Holy Spirit is here. She is with us. She is here with us.

## SILENCE

*Chime a bell to initiate a time of silence.*

*To break the silence, begin drumming slowly and softly.*

## BODY PRAYER

*This section is to be led as a prayerful meditation. The leader may allow for as much space as seems appropriate in between words.*

I invite each of you to find a place in the room where you are comfortable. You are welcome to be seated or standing. Find a place and a position that help you connect inwardly.

When you're comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes and focus on your breath. Take a long breath in ... and out ... a second breath in ... and out. ... Become aware of the way your breath feels in your body, moving through your nose or your mouth, in and out of your stomach. Become aware of your body's place in its environment.

Remember to take long breaths in ... and out ... . Acknowledge whatever you happen to be carrying in your body—stress, exhaustion, hope, joy, the unknown. Whatever it is, become aware of it.

Become aware of places in your body or in your spirit that hold tension. As you breathe in, I invite you to send your breath to those places. Take a long breath in ... and out ... in ... and out ... . Let the tension melt as you breathe in, and send it out of your body as you breathe out. [*Allow time for several long breaths.*]

As you are ready, I invite you to gently become aware of those around you. Knowing , feeling, believing the love in this room, let us channel this love as we breathe in ... and out ... .

## SINGING

*I found God in myself (see p. 27)*

## RESPONSIVE READING

Voice 1:       As the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
                  and do not return to it without watering the earth  
                  and making it bud and flourish,  
                  so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,  
                  so is my word that goes out from my mouth;  
                  it will not return to me empty.

Voice 2:       Come to the waters.

Voice 1:       Come to the waters.

ALL:           Come to the waters.

Voices 1 & 2:   Amen.

## SENDING

Go, knowing that you are held by the Holy Spirit,  
which is poured over you like breath, like water,



## Service 3: Fire

### VISUALS

*Continue to use the jar filled with beads and water as the central visual. During this service that is focused on fire, illuminate the worship space with candles of all kinds.*

### SINGING

*Sing the Journey #78: Sizohamba naye*

### ENTERING THE SPACE

Our love is a burning thing. Our love is dangerous. Our love is bold. Our love struts on a dark beach ... Why can't I keep my fingers off it, baby? Na-na, I want you. Our love is the mother bear. Our love brings down kingdoms. Our love forms a Peoples Barricade. Our love is abundant, a table that groans with food. Our love defies governments. Our love wails on the coffin of a child shot while wearing a hoodie.

They want our love to be quiet. They want our love to be safe. We should love calmly and rationally. We should love only those worthy of our love. We should guard our love and give it carefully, with great restraint. We should love others above loving ourselves.

But we know that our love cannot be limited like that.

Our love is not a box. It does not reach capacity. It does not weaken if too much is laid on it. Our love is a womb; strong and flexible, it grows as much as it needs to grow to hold the world in justice, safety and comfort.

Our bodies cannot hold our love. Our communities cannot contain it. The fire of our love spills into the world. Our love rages at abuse and injustice. And because our love is not a second-hand emotion, it is the action by which our world will turn.

### SINGING

*Hymnal: A Worship Book #26: Holy Spirit, come with fire*

## DWELLING

- Leader: We own our fierce love.
- Group 1: We fall into the fire of our emotions and are not ashamed.
- Group 2: We will not keep our love quiet!
- Leader: For God has poured the Spirit on all people and in those last days,  
our sons and our daughters will prophesy.
- Group 1: Our young women will see visions;
- Group 2: our old women will dream dreams.
- Leader: We own the physicality of our love,  
the love for our lovers, and we sing with the bride:
- All: “Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth, for your love is better than wine.”
- Leader: Let that love be given to all who wish to lead authentic lives in the open  
without fear or discrimination.
- Group 1: We own the protectiveness of our love,  
the love for our families.
- Group 2: Like Jochebed, we yearn to place our children in an ark of safety,  
to keep them from harm.
- Leader: Let that love be given to all the world’s sons and daughters,
- Group 1: to fight so that boys are no longer murdered in gas stations,
- Group 2: to rescue the girls before they become the spoils of war,
- All: to protect the children against becoming our collateral damage.
- Leader: We own the loyalty of our love, the love for our sisters, and we pledge with Ruth that,
- All: “Where you go, I shall go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people  
and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.”
- Leader: Let that love be given to all of our sisters—despite nationality, belief, ethnicity, race  
and class—those who are known to us and those who are unknown, in their struggle  
for dignity and empowerment.
- Group 1: Above all, we own the power of our love for the One who has willed us into existence.
- Group 2: And we say, as we have said since the words were first given,
- All: “We shall love our God with all our heart and with all our being and with all our might.”
- Leader: Let that love be raised to the Spirit,  
She who came to the followers in Jerusalem as tongues of flame.
- All: For through Her, our fierce, physical, protective, loyal love  
will encompass all of Her Creation.

## SINGING

*During this time of singing, encourage expression in various ways.  
Consider inviting vocal improvisation and/or dancing.*

*I found God in myself (see p. 27)*

*Walk into the holy fire (see p. 27)*

## RESPONSE

Our love is mighty and fierce, just as Sophia is mighty and fierce;  
our love for the world is the mirror of her love for us.

As we go out into the world, we call on the fires of her justice to hover over us as we burn a new path in the world.

## SINGING

*Sing the Story #124: My soul cries out*

## SENDING

Go in fire. Go in love. Go in justice.



## Service 4: Tensions in love

### VISUALS

*Continue to use the jar filled with beads and water as the central visual. If possible, position the string that will be used during the biblical storytelling section in a way that contributes to the visual.*

### SINGING

*Sing the Journey #109: There is more love somewhere*

*Consider adding this verse to the end of the song:*

*“There’s a sister somewhere / I’m gonna keep on ‘til I find her”*

### ENTERING THE SPACE

Remember your first broken heart?

Some boy, some girl hurt you, rejected you, said your presence is a problem for me,  
left you praying for more love somewhere?

Remember your second broken heart? Your third? Your fourth?

Remember the first time your family broke your heart?

Remember the first time your community broke your heart?

Remember the first time your church broke your heart?

Remember the second time? The third? The fourth?

Remember when your sister in Christ broke your heart?

Remember when I broke your heart?

Remember when you broke my heart?

Lord, have mercy on us.

### SINGING

*Sing the Story #68: Kyrie*

## BIBLICAL STORYTELLING

*You will need four storytellers for this section. Two will perform at a time. Prior to the service, place a long string with a few large beads strung onto it at the place where the storytellers will perform. At the beginning of each section, two storytellers will come up, and each will pick up one end of the string, holding it so that it is taut between them. The string represents the tension between the two characters. As they speak, they may tug on the string as it feels appropriate. At the end of each pair's piece, the storytellers are to each add a bead to the string and set it down. After each pair is finished, those gathered for worship are to be led in singing Kyrie as a response.*

### Pair 1: Leah and Rachel

**Leah:** I did not cry when my sister died in childbirth. I did not take her two sons as my own. I did not protect Joseph from his brothers. I did not become a second mother to Benjamin. My husband gave pleasure to Rachel willingly, eagerly. He enters me because it is his duty. It is her face he sees, her name he cries out; I am nothing but a body. I live in a world where a woman's sons are her only wealth. I am wealthy. What good is a sister's love to me? Would her love have stopped our father from tricking Jacob? Would her love have made me beautiful in his eyes? Would her love have given my sons their father's favor? Would her love have protected my daughter from Shechem? Would her love have given me more wealth?

**Rachel:** I am poor. The currency of my beauty was only good through the wedding night. Now my value is measured in sons, and I have no sons. There is no worth in the love my husband has for me. The long nights in my tent do not equal my bride price. But my sister? She has earned her bride price back sixfold. What do those long nights matter—what does that pleasure matter—if I have no sons? Her womb fills so easily; there is no struggle for her, they slide out of her one after another. I hate that he goes to her. I hate her when he goes to her. It does not matter that he thinks of me. If she didn't give him sons so easily, he would not go to her at all. And then she would not be so rich, and I might not be so poor.

*Sing the Story #68: Kyrie*

### Pair 2: Hagar and Sarah

**Hagar:** It was the only power I had. It was not a power I asked for. I did not choose to have Sarah as my mistress. I did not choose to be given to her husband to be bred, like a ewe. I did not choose to become pregnant, swollen and heavy. Why am I punished for giving your desired result? Was I not worthy of some elevation, some small extra privilege, as the mother of Abraham's firstborn son? Why begrudge me a tiny victory, you who have had so many? My son was not even my son. He was your son. Briefly, just ever so briefly. And then he was your slave. Your husband owned his own son. And I should be grateful that we were freed? With no money—just some bread and some water to survive in a desert? Do you think I can ever forget? Do you think my son will ever forget?



Sarah: I made her. I made her a mother of a great civilization. She was nothing but a slave girl, and I gave her to Abraham, and I made her pregnant, and I made her and her son a place in my house.

How dare it be so easy for her? How dare God let the womb of a slave girl open so easily? Each month that I bled, my heart bled, too.

And I know I had my own son. But watching her, watching her child was a constant reminder of the years without, of how I am only one son away from being irrelevant.

I am the wife. Just as Abraham is the head of our family, I am the head of this household. Just as Abraham makes the decisions on what is best for the family and we obey, I make the decisions on what is best for the household, and the household obeys.

She should be grateful for what she has been given. Grateful for the son, for the freedom and for the water and bread. It is so much more than any of our other slave girls have ever been given.

*Sing the Story #68: Kyrie*

## DWELLING

So, about this love,  
This fiery, burning love,  
That hunka hunka burning love,  
That new every morning love,  
You know—  
The steadfast love of The Holy that never ceases,  
Those mercies that never come to an end.  
They are new every morning,  
New every morning.

And then someone said—  
it was really pretty,  
really fancy what they said:  
“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels,” they said,  
“but have not love,”  
I’m just making noise.

They said love never fails,  
and I,  
I just don’t know ...  
Never?  
Never fails?  
Love will keep us together,  
Love is a many splendored thing,  
Love is a battlefield,  
Love hurts ...

How can I call you sister if you would betray me like that?  
How can I call you sister when you don't recognize that your wealth is built on my poverty?  
How can I call you sister when you exploit my people?  
How can I call you sister when you don't give me credit for doing the best I could with the hand  
I was dealt?  
How can I call you sister when you don't see what I see?  
When you don't know what I know ...  
When you don't even see ... me?  
How can I call you ...  
How can I love you ...  
How can I find you—my sister?

There's a bunch of stuff in the way.  
We didn't build this wall,  
but it works really well.  
We can't even see each other.  
Sister.  
Sister.  
Sister.

Can we move these bricks?  
Can we roll away this stone?  
Are you willing to crawl over the rubble?  
Risk scraping your knees and bloodying your hands as we dig through the aftermath of a war  
we did not declare?

But yet we do battle.  
Sister ...  
Sister ...  
Sister ...

## SILENCE

*Ring a bell to initiate a time of silence.*

## SINGING

*I found God in myself (see p. 27)*

## SENDING

Go, empowered to acknowledge tensions among us.  
Go, empowered to love in the midst of those tensions.



## Service 5: Sustaining love

### VISUALS

*In addition to the visuals used throughout the rest of the series, add scattered beads as a symbol that connects with the rituals of this service.*

*Provide baskets of beads and piles of pieces of string cut to 8–10 inches at the entrance to the worship space. Invite participants to choose several beads and three strands of string as they come in.*

### SINGING

*Sing the Journey #44: The love of God*

### ENTERING THE SPACE

Christa is among us here. She has been present throughout our time together, but it is now that we can look around the room and see her full-bodied, incarnated. Sophia surrounds her and surrounds us now.

Christa's womb holds the bread and wine, the flesh and blood. Her womb is love. In her womb she holds us, our stories and our pain. In her body we are named again as daughters of YHWH. And our stories, our names, our voices join the ancient stories, ancient names and ancient voices as we find ourselves dwelling together in Christa's womb. As Christa has taken us into herself, let us take the stories of our ancient sisters into ourselves.

### RESPONSIVE READING

Leader: And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was intensely desirable. The tree was lovely to look at, and she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her man, and he ate.

All: Make us Eve, ever reaching for more knowledge.

Leader: The visitor said, "I will surely return to you at this very season, and look, a son shall Sarah your wife have." And Sarah was listening at the tent flap behind them. Abraham and Sarah were old. Advanced in years, Sarah no longer had her woman's flow. And Sarah laughed inwardly, saying, "After being shriveled, shall I have pleasure? And my husband is old."

All: Make us Sarah, ever laughing at absurdity.

- Leader: Now Deborah was leading Israel at that time. She said to Barak, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, ‘Go take with you 10,000 men and lead them up to Mount Tabor.’” Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I’ll go, and if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.” “Certainly, I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours.”
- All: Make us Deborah, ever leading with courage.
- Leader: Esther sent this reply to Mordecai, “I will go to the king, even though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” On the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace in front of the king’s hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So, Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.
- All: Make us Esther, ever risking ourselves for justice.
- Leader: King David had become very old. His servants covered him with blankets, but he couldn’t stay warm. They said to him, “Allow us to find a young woman for our master, the king. She will serve the king and take care of him by lying beside our master, the king, and keeping him warm.” So they looked at every virgin in Israel until they found Abishag from Shunem. They brought her to the king. She was very beautiful. She cared for the king and served him, but the king didn’t have sex with her.
- All: Make us Abishag, ever providing comfort.
- Leader: When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.
- All: Make us Mary, sister of Martha, ever honest with our emotions.
- Leader: One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.
- All: Make us Lydia, ever true to our convictions.
- Leader: When she saw the angel, she was troubled at his words. She thought about what had been said. Mary said, “How will this happen? I have never had a man.” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you; the power of the Most High will shadow you. For God can do all things.” Then Mary said, “Let it happen to me as you have said.” The angel went away from her, but Mary hid all these words in her heart. She thought about them much.
- All: Make us Mary, ever welcoming mystery in hunger.

## RITUAL, Part 1

Scripture talks of a three-stranded cord that cannot be broken. We are that three-stranded cord. I am that three-stranded cord. You are that three-stranded cord. This sisterhood gathered here today is that three-stranded cord. And those three strands are our love, our pain and the Holy Spirit. It is She who knits together the things that are in tension: our love and our pain. It is Her knitting that creates the cord that cannot be broken. Because of the power of the Holy Spirit, we cannot be broken.

Beads have been a part of our worship together. Each individual bead of glass or wood or clay is beautiful in and of itself, and when they are gathered together, they create another thing of beauty. These beads represent our stories and our voices. They represent the stories and voices of other women who are not here, women from our time and women from long ago. They represent the stories of women who have had no voice and still have no voice.

That three-stranded cord that is so strong has woven within it our voices, our stories of love and our stories of pain, and our experiences of the holy. Our encounters with the heavenly womb, with Christa and with Sophia are braided into it. You were offered beads and strands as you came in. Take a few of the beads you have chosen for yourself and the strands you've picked up and create a cord of beauty to take with you today. For God is the Great Creator, and through Her body and Her Spirit, we are woven into one.

## SINGING

*Sing the Journey #38: Beloved, God's chosen*

## DWELLING

*During this time, a leader will read the text written below while a dancer (or several) interprets the text with movement. In the center or front of the worship space, arrange scarves of many colors. This time of dwelling is enhanced by the accompaniment of instrumental music. Percussion works especially well.*

*To begin, the leader will read the paraphrased Proverbs text while the dancer waits outside of the worship space.*

Leader: Before the first acts of creation, Sophia was born. Before the deep seas, she was brought forth, before there were fountains or springs of water; before the mountains erupted into place, before the hills—she was born—before God created the earth or its fields, or even the first clods of dirt.

She was there when the Almighty created the heavens and set the horizon just above the ocean, set the clouds in the sky and established the springs of the deep, gave the seas their boundaries and set their limits at the shoreline. When the foundation of the earth was laid out, Sophia was the skilled artisan standing with the Almighty.

Happy are those who listen to her and keep her ways, for those who find Sophia find life.  
*(Paraphrased from Proverbs 8:22-35)*

*Pause. As the leader continues with the next section of the reading, the dancer(s) will come into the area where the colorful scarves are arranged on the floor. Encourage the dancer to interpret the text as she sees fit. She may want to spin when the text describes God as one who spins. She may want to pick up a blue scarf and wave it through the air above her head when the text speaks of silken strands of blue creating the sky. Let the dancer's energy reflect the energy of the reader, and vice versa. The dancer is to interact with the scarves in ways that communicate God's joy and delight and power and vulnerability in creating the world.*

Leader: I imagine a spinning God,  
pulling silken strands of blue from the cosmos and creating the sky,  
flinging it across the expanse and calling it good.

I imagine a weaving God,  
nimble pulling strips of blues and greens,  
raising up mountains,  
putting down valleys,  
tucking in silver streams among the meadows  
and gracing the landscape with vegetation:  
fruits and nuts and seeds and berries  
pushed down,  
shaken together,  
running over,  
enough to feed a multitude of multitudes.

I imagine a painting God,  
delighting in the squishy feel of wet pigment—  
rich, thick dollops dripping down between God's fingers.

Burnt sienna.

Ochre.

Umber.

Butter yellow.

Pale almond.

Peach vanilla.

Midnight black.

All the colors of the world lavishly displayed on all the people of the world.  
And God is plum delighted.

Creative God:

Spinning,

Weaving,

Painting God ...

May we recreate with you the world you dreamed into being.

Amen.

## SILENCE

*Ring a bell to initiate a time of silence.*

## BODY PRAYER

*This section is to be led as a prayerful meditation. The leader may allow for as much space as seems appropriate in between words.*

I invite you to find a place in the room where you are comfortable. You are welcome to be seated or standing. Find a place and a position that help you connect inwardly.

When you're comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes and focus on your breath. Take a long breath in ... and out ... a second breath in ... and out. ... Become aware of the way your breath feels in your body, moving through your nose or your mouth, in and out of your stomach. Become aware of your body's place in its environment.

Remember to take long breaths in ... and out ... . Acknowledge whatever you happen to be carrying in your body—stress, exhaustion, hope, joy, the unknown. Whatever it is, become aware of it.

Become aware of places in your body or in your spirit that hold tension. As you breathe in, I invite you to send your breath to those places. We know that energy affects the elements: water, earth, fire, air. We know that our bodies are mostly water and air.

I invite you to breathe in the energy you need as you consider ending this worship series. Take that energy in as you breathe in. If there is any energy that you wish to let go as you consider ending this worship series, I invite you to breathe that energy out as you exhale, into the universe that can transform it. And if there is any energy you wish to send to a person, to a people, to a place in the world, to a structure of power, to a force that feels out of your control, I invite you to breathe that energy out to its recipient—perhaps as a blessing.

Take a long breath in ... and out ... in ... and out ... . As you are ready, I invite you to gently become aware of those around you and to extend a hand to someone near you. I invite us to take a sacred breath together, in ... and out ... , knowing , feeling, believing the love in this room, the love that manifests in a myriad of ways and intersections and complexities and tensions, the love that is in our bodies and our breath and our spirits and our guts. Let us channel this love as we breathe in ... and out ... .

## SINGING

*Somebody prayed for me*

By Dorothy Norwood and Alvin Darling. Published as #505 in the *African American Heritage Hymnal* (GIA Publications: 2001) and #608 in *Lead Me, Guide Me* (2nd ed.) (GIA Publications: 2011). Sheet music can be found online at [hymnary.org](http://hymnary.org).

*Consider using the verses:*

*Somebody prayed for me ...*

*My sister prayed for me ...*

*My mother prayed for me ...*

## RITUAL, Part 2

*This ritual requires that extra beads be available to those who need them. During the ritual, participants are encouraged to get up and speak with each other as they offer their beads—in whatever manner is appropriate. The duration of the ritual will depend on the size of the group. After the invitation (below) is offered, arrange for instrumental music to fill the space during the ritual.*

My sisters, God's beloved, ours is not an unrequited love. Our love is offered to God, and She receives it. God offers Her love to us, and we receive it in turn. This experience has been full of offerings of love—layer upon layer upon layer. We gave offerings of music. We gave the offering of our bodies in meditation, in dance, in movement—breathing in and breathing out, feeling the rhythms of our hearts. We offered our voices raised in song, raised in conversation where we named our pain and our trauma, raised in words of encouragement and blessing—words upon words upon words—caring for one another with our voices. We offered ourselves.

We would like to end this time together by extending an opportunity for all of us to offer one more thing in this space. If there is someone in this room whom you would like to give a blessing to, I invite you to go to her or him and offer one of the beads that you kept back from the string that you made for yourself earlier. If you used all of your beads, you may go get more from the baskets.

This does not have to be an exchange. You don't have to pair up. You don't have to do anything. But if there is someone who spoke a word to you that you will carry with you from this space, or if you feel the need to speak a word to someone or give a blessing for the journey, now is the time.

And, bless yourselves in this blessing as well. Think about the moments you treasure from our time together that you will take with you. Think about the things you will ponder in your heart because they trouble you, because they bring you joy. I offer this as a time for us to bless one another and do the act of centering again, remembering that we can't stay in the center. In love, let's bless each other.

## SINGING

*I found God in myself (see p. 27)*

*Ring a bell to initiate a period of silence.*

## SENDING

Go in fierce love.





## Love Feast

*For this love feast, which may be celebrated during any of the services in this series, you will need to prepare sticky rice—enough for each person present to have the equivalent of one spoonful. Other items needed include a spoon, honey, beads, a glass jar or vase, and napkins or hand wipes. If you would like the love feast to be vegan, consider using maple syrup instead of honey.*

*Prepare one small table with a basket of sticky rice and container of honey. The honey works best if it is in a squeeze bottle. Place the empty jar or vase on a second table, and arrange the two tables so that when participants come up, they will arrive at the table with the empty vase before arriving at the table with rice and honey. Additionally, place baskets of beads at the entrance of the worship space with instructions for participants to take a few when they come in.*

*Participants will be invited to approach the tables. First, they will be invited to place their beads into the vase to represent the ways that they are already offering their gifts and energy to the work of living God's way of love. Then, they will be invited to continue to the table prepared with rice and honey to receive sustenance (rice) and abundance (honey) for the journey of continuing to love in a world rife with struggle and oppression.*

*It is helpful to have two people serve the rice and honey. The first person will spoon out a bit of rice from the basket as each person approaches. The second person will add a dollop of honey to the rice. Participants will take the sticky rice off of the spoon with their hands as these words are spoken: "Strength for the journey."*

*The sticky rice clumps together and is easy to eat with one's hands. Taking the rice from the spoon functions much like tearing a piece of bread from a loaf during communion. The honey can be placed so that participants don't need to touch it when taking the rice, but having hand wipes available somewhere in the room may be helpful.*

*Consider providing music during the love feast.*

### INVITATION

In keeping with our focus on love, we'd like to call this time in our service a love feast, a time when we come together to share in substance that nourishes our bodies and to share in the ways in which we connect with one another that nourish our spirits. This love feast is a visceral, physical symbol of that nourishment.

As you entered this space, you were encouraged to pick up a few beads from the baskets. We've been using beads in various ways throughout this series, and the beads that you picked up represent the gifts and energy that each of us is already offering to the work of living God's way of love. You are invited to come forward and fill this jar [*signal toward the table with the empty jar*] with your beads to honor the ways in which you are contributing to this work.

This is also a time for you to receive. As you continue up to this table [*signal toward the table with honey and rice*], you will receive an offering in the form of rice and honey. The sticky rice represents the basic, foundational substances that nourish women, men and children throughout the world and sustain life. The honey represents the sweetness of abundance that is gifted to us from time to time by our loving God. Today, we are thinking of this rice and honey as representing our connection to the global community as well as to each other as we are gathered here.

As the music begins, you are welcome to come forward. Make your offering of beads in the glass jar. Then, continue moving forward to the table with rice and honey, where you will be offered the feast and a blessing.

Come.

Let the ways that you strive toward love in the midst of struggle be seen. Let them be honored. Let them be.

Come.

Receive the nourishment of our God and of this community that offers you strength for the road ahead, wherever it may lead.



Women in Leadership Project

[www.MennoniteUSA.org/women](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org/women)  
1-866-866-2872

## Songs

**I Found God In Myself**  
CHANT

Ntozake ShangeAuthor Unknown




And I found God in my - self. I found  
 God in my - self. And I loved Her fierce - ly! oh! I loved Her fierce - ly!  
 I found God in my - self. And self.

Lyrics by Ntozake Shange. Published in *Songs for Earthlings: A Green Spirituality Songbook*, compiled and edited by Julie Forest Middleton, Emerald Earth Publishing: 1998, p. 256.

**Walk Into the Holy Fire**  
CHANT

Author Unknown



Walk in - to the ho - ly fi - re, step in - to the ho - ly flame,  
 walk in - to the ho - ly fi - re, step in - to the ho - ly flame. A -  
 le - lu - ya. A - - - - le - lu - ya

By Anubhava (now known as Peter Makena). Published in *Songs for Earthlings: A Green Spirituality Songbook*, compiled and edited by Julie Forest Middleton, Emerald Earth Publishing: 1998, p. 32; and in *The Song Book—Drinking from Your Wine, Bhagwan*.