

## **Westminster United Church**

March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025

✝ You are invited to stand as you are able

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS/LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH**

#### **FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT**

##### **Meditation:**

We have come together this morning for renewal—in worship and as a community of faith. We've greeted one another, laughed and hugged. But now the time of reflection and stillness is upon us. It is the first Sunday in Lent—the season for journeys of the heart. Close your eyes. Be still. Listen. We are entering a holy time. The Lenten candles have been lit, but over the next six weeks the light will slowly fade into darkness. For we are retelling the story of Jesus' betrayal and suffering and death. We do this not to be morbid, but because in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, God is revealed—in the amazing transformation of death into life, in endings transformed into beginnings, and in dead-ends that become a source for new possibilities.

This is the sacred center of our faith—the truth made manifest in Jesus Christ—that God is in each and every one of us, quietly transforming us and the world. In his pain and suffering, Jesus speaks to every pain and loss you have endured and offers you the promise of transformation. It's an old story, but it still has the power to reveal, to heal, and to redeem. Jesus is at the heart of our faith, in the depth of our souls. He is waiting for us, inviting us to leave ordinary time and follow along with him on the journey that brought him to the Cross. Listen in silence, for Jesus is calling you.

(Silent time.)

As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain of injustice in the world.

(A candle is extinguished.)

**Let us pray:**

**All: Loving God, as we journey through this holy season of Lent, give us strength and courage to make the changes that are needed in our lives. Open our hearts and minds to your steadfast presence and help us to put our trust in you. Amen.**

**INTROIT (VU 114 VS 1) 'Forty Days and Forty Nights'**

### **Land Acknowledgement**

Today as we gather to worship let us remember that we worship God on the historic and unceded lands of Treaty 7 and neighbouring Treaty 4. Traditional lands of the Metis, Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Stoney Nakoda and the T'suut'ina as well as the Cree and Ojibwa people. As Christ's people, let us be people of love, truth and reconciliation. May we live with respect on this land, and peace and friendship with its people.

### **Affirming Statement**

"As a community church that gathers from many smaller communities in the Medicine Hat area, Westminster United Church publicly declares our commitment to creating a space where people are welcome, safe, and encouraged to participate in the life of the church inclusive of: Sexual orientation, gender identity, two spirited people, differing abilities, age, ethnic background, race, marital status, or economic circumstance.

Participation in the life of the church includes leadership, membership, sacraments, marriage, and celebrating milestones of life's journey. We celebrate the richness of diversity, and we commit ourselves to openness, growth, education and to influencing the community for social justice.

In our dedication to living our God's word and with God's help, we devote ourselves to proactive learning and inclusion."

## **✝ PASSING THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

### **✝ CALL TO WORSHIP**

Welcome to our Affirm PIE day service. Each Sunday closest to March 14<sup>th</sup>, we recommit to the public. Intentional and Explicit acts of being a welcoming community to all. Whomever you are, however you identify, whomever you love, wherever you may be on your faith journey-you are not only safe here but holy/wholly and fully welcome just as you are. No judgement. No condemnation.

### **✝ Procession of Christ Candle**

Long, long ago before there was anything, before there was a world, before there was light, before there was darkness, there was God: Creator and Source of Life. God moved and God breathed the world into being, and God said, "Let there be light." Not quite so long but still very long ago, one was born who embodied the light of the Creator. We present this candle to remind ourselves and to celebrate Christ's constant presence. May we always seek His guiding light in our lives, as we are called to carry that light into the world.

### **Lighting of the Rainbow Candle**

Jesus taught us to love one another in a way that sparked a movement and a new understanding of God. We light this rainbow candle as a visible reminder of the radical inclusivity shown to us by Jesus, who calls us to follow him.

### **Lighting of Peace Candle**

"We light the candle of Peace to remind ourselves that Christ is the Prince of Peace. We pray for peace for ourselves and for the world."

✠ **OPENING HYMN MV 145** 'Draw the Circle Wide' (Lyrics on powerpoint)

### ✠ **OPENING PRAYER**

Lord, the temptations of the world loom large before us. We are enticed, cajoled, and “sweet-talked” into moving from lives of self-centeredness. We need your healing love. As you loved all whom you met, help us to place our trust in you, that we may be strong in our faith and confident in our service to you through serving others. **AMEN.**

### **Prayer of Confession**

Lord, in a world that values toys and “the bigger, the better” help us to remember that *who* we love is more important than *what* we love. Let us remember that you turned no one away no matter who they were. Help us keep our minds open to new learning and new ways in the world. We ask in Jesus’ name. **AMEN.**

### **Words of Assurance**

### **Prayers of the People**

#### **THE LORD’S PRAYER**

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Lord, as we hear your word, grant us insight into your holy message that we may carry it forward into the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. **AMEN.**

### **SCRIPTURE READINGS**

**Acts 8:26-40**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

**Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch**

<sup>26</sup> Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south<sup>[a]</sup> to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) <sup>27</sup> So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup> and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' <sup>30</sup> So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' <sup>31</sup> He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. <sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,  
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,  
so he does not open his mouth.

<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.'

<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' <sup>35</sup> Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>38</sup> He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip<sup>[c]</sup> baptized him. <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> But 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.

One: This is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**All: Praise to Christ, the Living Word.**

**SERMON:**

✝ **HYMN: MV 138** 'My Love Colours Outside The Lines' (lyrics on powerpoint)

**MINUTES FOR MISSION "PIE—Public, Intentional, Explicit Inclusion"**

March 14 is PIE Day, and in church circles it has nothing to do with math. "PIE" is short for "public, intentional, and explicit"—the standards we hold ourselves to when we seek to live into being affirming, welcoming, and inclusive people and communities.

PIE Day was co-founded by Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble and Affirming Connections. Every year, Affirm United invites the church to celebrate the full inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in faith communities and beyond. The day also reminds and challenges us to continue widening our welcome to embody love and celebrate gender and sexual diversity in all its forms. It's critical that we do.

Gender identity and sexual orientation continue to be used to justify serious human rights violations around the world. Same-sex sexual activity is a crime in 71 countries; in 11 of these the death penalty is at least a possibility. Canada is now home to 1 million people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. In 2019, police reported a 41 percent increase in hate crimes targeting people for their sexual orientation over the previous year, the highest total since 2009.

Your gifts through Mission and Service sustain life-transforming advocacy and education work, including supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ refugees fleeing for their lives and providing community awareness education, human rights programs, and safe spaces.

This work is vitally important. For some, it means the difference between life and death.

Thank you for giving through [Mission and Service](#). God's compassionate love knows no boundaries. Your generosity shows ours doesn't either.

### **INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

In a world where we have so much and so many have so little, let us come now with help for the less fortunate. The offering will now be taken.

✝ **DOXOLOGY: VU 537 Vs 2** 'Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands' (lyrics on power point)

### ✝ **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Lord, we share our abundance on this day so that those without may gain from our generosity.

✝ **A NEW CREED (VU 918)**

✝ **Closing Hymn MV 161** 'I Have Called You by Your Name' (Lyrics on powerpoint)

✝ **BENEDICTION/COMMISSIONING**

✝ **CHORAL AMEN (VU 971)**

✝ **SENDING FORTH HYMN MV 62** 'There is Room for All' (Lyrics on powerpoint)