

Dear Friends,

October 21-23, 2026 will be our Clergy Retreat. It is a time for our clergy to come together, to share joys and challenges of ministry, and to relax and rejuvenate for the work ahead. This is such an important time together for our clergy.

This year we are pleased to offer this complete service for the Sunday following the Clergy Retreat so that your lay volunteers can lead the worship service. Many clergy will take this as part of their continuing education and this will make it easier for the congregations to lead worship.

A big thank you to Rev. Karen Bursey who wrote the service including the sermon. Please note that hymn selection are at the end of the order of worship along with prayers of the people and sermon.

Thank you
Heather Sandford
Regional Minister

**Retreat Sunday Service
October 25, 2026**

(Please feel free to move or omit elements of the service to suit your congregation's usual Order of Service)

Prelude

Announcements

Call to Worship

We are called to love God with our hearts.

**We will do so, when we welcome those
tossed aside by the world.**

We are called to love God with our souls.

**We will do so, when the brokenness around us
transforms us into more compassionate people.**

We are called to love God with our minds.

**We will do so, when we think less of our needs,
and see each person as our neighbour, our sister, our brother.**

Prayer of Approach

Every generation has found its home in you, God our provider, and discovered that every moment spent in your holy presence lasts beyond all imaginable time. You watch over us in the night, cradling us in your arms as tenderly as a nurse cares for her children, and her neighbour's.

Full of wisdom, you humbled yourself that we might learn to love those who have been swept aside by a callous and cruel world. Witness to God's grace, you call us to act in ways of love of peace to all we meet in this life.

In the fresh breeze on a summer's day; in the leaves dancing across autumn's lawns; in the crisp, new snowfall crunching beneath our feet; in the new life flowering in the spring: from everlasting to everlasting, you proclaim God's grace to us, Spirit of Life.

Holy One, continue to be the dwelling place of our minds, our hearts, our souls, even as we pray as we have been taught, (The Lord's Prayer)

OR

Holy One, continue to be the dwelling place of our minds, our hearts, our souls, welcoming us as we worship you this day. Amen

Hymn

Minute for Mission

<https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/get-involved/mission-and-service/mission-and-service-stories>

Call to Repentance

We have been entrusted with the message of the gospel, but all too often act as if the memos from sin and death have more influence in our lives. Let us confess our sins, so we might know God's great love for us.

Prayer of Confession

As you know, God our healer, we stand on the edge of your promises and hopes, yet cannot seem to let ourselves cross over into the life you intend for us. We seek praise from our families, yet are unable to tell them how much we love them; we care more about our needs and desires, than for the struggles of our neighbours; we think more about the trash we read and see than focussing on the Spirit of wisdom.

Forgive us, Everlasting God. Renew our lives with your grace; restore our hopes with your vision of tomorrow; refresh our spirits with your joy which comes to us new in each moment in the gift of your Child, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Silence is kept.

Assurance of Pardon

This moment, this morning, this day, and in all the days to come, God's compassion and hope fill our lives. What joyous good news!

Our hope is not in vain. God forgives our sins, and is the dwelling place for all people. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Offering Invitation

As we think of our neighbours, may our souls be touched by their needs, and our hearts open our resources to offer gifts to will bring healing, peace, and grace to all. Our offering will now be received

Offering

Offering Hymn/Verse

Prayer of Dedication

The hungry, the homeless, the searching, the addicted - our neighbours are all around us, O God. We pray that as we offer our gifts, they might be used not only to bring these sisters and brothers closer to you, but to us as well. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 - Death of Moses and the end of the Torah which means “instruction” or “teaching” or “law”.

In its most common usage, the Torah refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—also called the Pentateuch. These books are traditionally ascribed to Moses, who received divine revelation at Mount Sinai. The Torah is preserved in handwritten parchment scrolls (Sefer Torah) in synagogues and read during religious services. (from Wikipedia)

Alternate reading

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18 part of the Holiness Code

The Holiness Code, found in Leviticus 17-26, calls the Israelites to live holy lives, reflecting God's holiness through ethical, ritual, and social conduct. It is a distinct section of Leviticus, often identified by scholars as chapters 17-26, sometimes including chapter 27, and occasionally passages in Numbers and Exodus.

*It is named for its repeated emphasis on the Hebrew word *qə ḏš* (holy), which originally meant "set apart" and conveys ideas of being special, pure, or dedicated to God*

Unlike earlier chapters of Leviticus, which focus primarily on priestly rituals and sacrifices, the Holiness Code emphasizes the holiness of the entire Israelite community, not just the priesthood (from Wikipedia)

Responsive Psalm 1 Voices United #724

Epistle 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 A Man of Lawlessness

Gospel Matthew 22:34-40 (41-46) The Great Commandment (Whose Son is the Christ?)

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Also found in Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-28 (followed by the Good Samaritan Parable)

Hymn

Meditation

Musical Reflection (Anthem?)

Prayers of the People

Hymn

Sending Forth

And now go forth, to love God with all your heart, your mind, your soul:

with passion, with prayer, with intelligence;

to love your neighbour: with forgiveness, with service, with love;

and to love yourself: with hope, with joy, with peace.

Benediction

Suggested Hymns

226 For the Beauty of the Earth
227 For the Fruit of All Creation
264 Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
333 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
334 All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
348 O Love How Deep
367 Come Down O Love Divine
378 Spirit of God, Descend upon My Hear
430 God Be in My Head
529 Great God, We Sing that Mighty Hand
633 Bless Now, O God, the Journey
642 Be Thou My Vision

Call to Worship and Prayers are based on Lectionary Liturgies by Rev. Thom M. Shuman

Some suggestions for Prayers of the People

An alternate Prayer of the Day by Rev. Thom M. Shuman

We are blessed when we listen to the songs of goodness;
 when we skip down the paths of grace hand-in-hand with wide-eyed kids.
We are blessed when we pay attention to the Word of life and welcome;
 when we think about it more than once in a while.
We are blessed when we put down roots in life's soil,
 watered by the Gardener dipping from pools of peace.
We are blessed when we share hope with the hungry;
 and offer cool cups of trust to all who are parched by the world.
We are blessed when evil becomes dust drifting away;
 when we choose not to chill with troublemakers.
We are blessed when we play leapfrog with wonder;
 when God sits on a bench knitting and watching with a careful eye.

(Ending with) We are blessed by you, God in Community, Holy in One, and so lift the prayer we have been taught, (The Lord's Prayer)

Here is a prayer of intercession (Proper 25A, Ordinary 30A). It was written by Rev. MaryAnn Rennie, a minister of Corstorphine: St. Anne's Parish Church in Edinburgh. She suggests:

“If you have access to power-point and your congregation are comfortable with the notion of having a visual focus for prayer, why not choose three “visions” from the week's news/local events to focus prayer around. A sung response could be used to separate the “visions,” [for example, Ubi caritas et amor].

Prayer of Intercession

(based on Deuteronomy 34:1-12, Matthew 22:34-46; I Thessalonians 2:1-8)

God of the mountaintop, in prayer You walk us to the highest point from which we are offered an opportunity to view the world as You see it, and the world as You would wish it to be. There is much to be thankful for, for we enjoy opportunities of good health and reasonable living standards; of times of relaxation and times to work; of a roof over our heads, and opportunities to feed our bellies, and our imaginations and the aching of our hearts.

From your vantage point we praise You for all that is good for us, and allow You to draw our eyes from our concerns to those of our neighbours, our community, our world.

In prayer our eyes are drawn to see those in need of love in our community, both here in church and in the parish of which we are part. Help us not to be afraid of what is different or unknown to us, but instead willing to offer friendship and accept the opportunities to grow in knowledge and experience.

Our eyes are drawn to places of power and leadership as we look for those who govern to offer leadership in difficult times. May those who seek to serve as politicians and leaders of communities find themselves shaped by the words, hopes and ideals of those who place their trust in them.

Our eyes are drawn to places of hunger and need. Teach us to share the resources we would covet, and enable us through the activity of Your Spirit in prayer and with action to be part of a creation where all are treated fairly and all have enough to eat.

As You, Lord of vision, draw our eye back to the world of which we are part may our lives be shaped by You to offer others a vision of Your love shown in our faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

— Rev. Mary Ann R. Rennie, posted on the Starters for Sunday on the Church of Scotland website.

Reflection Suggestion

Matthew 22:34-40

October 25, 2026

*(This Passage is also found in Mark 12 and Luke 10.
In Luke it is immediately followed by the parable of the Good Samaritan.)*

The Shema from the Hebrew word 'shemak', to hear, may be one of the best known sentences in the Bible. Certainly among the Jews it may be the most written, spoken and thought about commands.

The Shema says "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." [Deuteronomy 6:4,5]

To this day Jewish children are taught that command in the manner proscribed in Deuteronomy. The words are written down and placed in leather boxes about the size of a match box with long straps called **tephillum** or **phylacteries** in the New Testament. Then the phylacteries are tied to foreheads and arms, so the scholars are literally tying on the word of God.

In addition most Jewish homes have the Shema written on parchment, rolled up and placed in a leather or metal tube, and installed on a protected spot in the door posts of their homes. This is a **mezuzah** which is touched by those entering or leaving as they pause to meditate on the promise within. That we know these words so well is not an accident of fate but an act of faith.

In spite of its popularity, the Shema was only one of the 613 commands known, obeyed and honoured by Judaism. It seems a daunting system, but as Herbert O'Driscoll points out "the very complexity was saying that every aspect of being alive is holy and God is involved in it."

When the teacher of the law who was so impressed by Jesus words, asked him to name the most important command. I don't think this was a trap or a trick question in the same vein as the previous passage in Matthew on about paying taxes or giving to Caesar what is Caesars. It may have been challenge of competency or orthodoxy as these conversations were. In asking, the man sought an answer which would allow him to evaluate Jesus' theology.

It was a common practice to ask teachers to sum up the law in a few words. The great teacher, Rabbi Hillel was once asked to teach the entire law while standing on one leg. He said, "What you hate for yourself, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole law, the rest is commentary. Go and learn." Such sayings remained fashionable even within the Christian community. St. Augustine said "Love God - and do as you please." Presumably the love of God would guide what it is that you please.

The modern equivalent would be the sayings on bumper stickers, posters and plaques which have cycles of popularity. Perhaps you remember: "Let go and let God" or "God is my co-pilot" or for ministers "My boss is a Jewish carpenter"

Whatever was intended, Jesus took the question seriously as a major matter of faith and answered in kind.

Jesus might have replied with one of the ten commandments. For example, "honour your father and mother" would indicate his support for family; "do not kill" - his respect for human life; "do not covet" - would signify both appropriate attitudes he expected of others and his appreciation for value of private property.

Or Jesus could have answered with the negative form of the golden rule, "do not do to another, things which you do not want them to do to you", which was currently popular among various schools of thought. Choosing it would have indicated that Jesus supported behavioural approach to salvation.

However, Jesus chose the Shema, a command that encompasses both an understanding of God and a call to respond. The Jews were often surrounded by other groups and influences. The scripture set them apart and helped them define their God, a key element of their identity.

The Shema tells the Jews and us in no uncertain terms who God is; the Lord your God is one, the only one. The divine being is not fragmented into many parts, each with a different concern as the gods of many other groups were divided.

The Lord is one, the Lord is all. Because there is only one God, we in turn are able to worship God with the whole of our being. We are not or should not be torn between choices in worship - this god of water or that god of soil; this god of money, that god of enjoyment.

The command to love God is divided into sections not to indicate separate ways of worshipping God but rather to emphasize the totality of our worship.

All our hearts, which in Hebrew includes both the mind and the will, all our souls, all of our strength, not just fragments of heart, soul, and strength. Each 'ALL' accumulates into a mountain of love. Nothing less than our total love is required - nothing less is sufficient.

To experience such conformity among the parts of our lives is to create a unity of purpose and drive that integrates everything around a central passion. A life that is going in too many directions without such a unifying principle is open to death by miscellaneous forces. Such a life will never direct its efforts in one area with enough intensity to make a statement or accomplish a major goal.

Jesus added to the Deuteronomy passage the words "all your mind" to emphasize our thoughtful participation in God's will.

The scribe may have expected Jesus to stop with this command but for Jesus the command had to be applied to real life. To do that he complemented the Deuteronomy passage with one of the laws in Leviticus [19:18], "Love your neighbour as yourself". That addition is important to the setting of priorities in our living.

It is all too easy to tie the Shema to worship and spirituality, ignoring the realities of life. Wearing such blinders, we could be very devoted to God and yet allow the family down the street to starve to death, or pass by the wounded man on the road. Loving your neighbour grounds your love for God.

However, we should not put this command in the simplistic "let's be nice to everyone" level of theology we might find taught to kids by Barney the dinosaur. That maybe fine as a starting place for five year olds, but we have grown beyond that level of love. Loving you neighbour does not mean making your neighbour love you. Sometimes loving your neighbour means disagreeing with him or working on the opposite side of issues from her.

Loving your neighbour means that you respect the integrity of people holding other positions. Loving your neighbour means working towards a solution which may not please everyone and may even cause some measure of pain on all sides.

In his book the “Prayers of Life”, Rev. Michel Quoist, offers meditations inspired by daily life, helping readers to see God’s presence in ordinary events and to respond through prayer. He emphasizes that prayer should be a dialogue with God, attentive to both the small and significant moments of life. He wrote that it is in the world that God has placed us and it is in the world that Christ awaits us.

Loving others without forgetting that they are *persons*, very often means creating and implementing structures at every level of church, government and society which will enable them to grow in justice and in love. We are obliged to go to the very end in love for our neighbours but with the minds of those saved by Christ. This is the way of living the Shema and faithfully loving God.

This is good news for today.