

The Glebe-St. James United Church

Black History Month Service

February 15, 2026

Gathered by God

PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP

O What Sorrow, O What Joy
Idyll

Tanzanian hymn setting

WELCOME

SUSAN PALMAI

In the name of the Holy Mystery,
who is Wholly Love,
we welcome you to Creator's House.

Thanks be to God!

Good morning and welcome, everyone, to our worship service at Glebe-St. James United Church in downtown Ottawa on Sunday, January 25th.

My name is Susan and I am ...

We're so glad you're here today. Whether you're a first-time guest or a longtime member, whether you are joining us in person or online, we hope you feel at home. This is a place of faith, love, and community. Glebe-St. James is an Affirming Community of Faith in the United Church of Canada. We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment where people of all ages, backgrounds, and identities feel loved and supported. Thank you for being here.

Friends, note who is seated near you, introduce yourself and invite them to join us for a time of fellowship in Fraser Hall after the service. We also encourage everyone to wear a name tag – they are available at the entrances to the church. Our newer members have told us how important it is to feeling welcome to get to know each other by name. And as I get older, I find it useful for those “senior moments” when I can't recall the names of the people I already know!

If you are new to Glebe-St. James and want more information, just fill out one of the green cards that are available near the entrances, place it on the offering plate or give it to one of the greeters and they will pass it into the office.

Today's worship service bulletin can be found on the GSJ website, along with a link to this week's announcements and a "donate" button to make your offering. If you are here in person,

you can share your offering in the service, either in the collection plate, by e-transfer or through our website – the QR code, found on the back of the pews, will take you to the website.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This is a busy community, and lots is going on. I will just highlight a few announcements, but you will find a more complete list on our website and scrolling on the screens here in the sanctuary before and after our service.

Upcoming Events:

Shrove Tuesday, February 18th we will be serving pancakes starting at 5:30.
Our Ash Wednesday service will happen on the Tuesday following the pancakes
Queer Space will happen on February 25th so as not to conflict with the dinner.

Our Annual Congregational Meeting will happen on Sunday, March 1st.

And now, let's acknowledge the land on which our sanctuary stands.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Teresa Burnett-Cole

We acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. The Algonquin Anishinaabe have lived on and cared for these lands and waters since time immemorial. Their deep relationships with the rivers, forests, and skies continue to shape this place today. We honour their enduring presence, sovereignty, and inherent rights as the original stewards of this territory.

We also recognize that the history of this land is intertwined with the histories of Black peoples in early Canada. During the colonial period, both Indigenous and African-descended peoples experienced displacement, racial discrimination, and systems of enslavement. As Black Loyalists and later freedom seekers arrived in British North America, some settled on or near Indigenous territories, including lands within Algonquin homelands. In certain moments, relationships were built through shared labour, trade, kinship, and mutual support in the face of colonial injustice.

At the same time, we acknowledge that colonial governments imposed policies that dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of their lands while positioning Black settlers within the same colonial framework. These systems often created divisions and inequities, even as both communities navigated oppression. Recognizing this complexity invites us to reflect honestly on the layered histories of this territory.

Today, we honour Afro-Indigenous peoples and the ongoing connections between Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation. Acknowledging this land calls us not only to gratitude, but to responsibility: to listen, to learn, and to act in ways that support the self-determination of the Algonquin Anishinaabe and foster solidarity across communities.

May this acknowledgement ground our work in respect, truth, and meaningful relationships.

LIGHTING OF CHRIST CANDLE

The season of Epiphany started with the Magi from a distant land following the star to the child Jesus.

May we continue to seek Christ's enlightening spirit in the company of all people.

We gather in the light of Christ.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in Black History Month to honor truth and celebrate resilience.

We come with gratitude and hope.

Jesus calls us the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

We will preserve what is good and shine where justice is needed.

Come, let us worship in love.

Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

O Divine Creator, source of all life and love, we come before you in this sacred time of Black History Month, grateful for the rich heritage and profound resilience of Black people within the United Church of Canada, who have been a vital part of this community from its very beginning.

We offer our heartfelt lament for the injustices, systemic racism, and the heavy burdens of history that have scarred your beloved children. We grieve the pain, the marginalization, and the times when the church has failed to fully embrace their gifts and affirm their inherent worth. Heal the wounds of the past and present, and guide us toward true repentance and reconciliation.

And today we remember the words of Jesus, who calls us the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Forgive us for the times we have ignored the salt that has preserved faith through struggle. Forgive us for the ways we have hidden the light, dimming voices, overlooking leadership, and failing to make room for the fullness of Black dignity and Black sacred worth.

Yet, we also raise our voices in joyous hope. We celebrate the unwavering faith, the vibrant spirit, and the enduring strength of Black members who have enriched our community life with their music, wisdom, courage, and leadership. We give thanks for their ancestors' resilience and the legacy they continue to build.

Inspire us to action, O God. Empower us, people of the African diaspora and allies alike, to dismantle the systems of oppression that persist, both within our walls and in the wider world. Fill us with your Spirit so that our hope may translate into justice and our celebration into genuine equity. Help us to be a church that protects what is good like salt, and shines with truth like light, so that all may see the goodness of love lived out.

May we, as a united community, walk together in love, honoring the full dignity of all people. Come, let us worship in love. Amen.

HYMN My Lord, What A Morning

VU 708

**My Lord, what a morning.
My Lord, what a morning.
My Lord, what a morning
when the stars begin to fall.**

- 1 You'll hear the trumpet sound
to wake the nations underground,
Looking to my God's right hand
when the stars begin to fall. R**
- 2 You'll hear the sinner cry
to wake the nations underground,
Looking to my God's right hand
when the stars begin to fall. R**
- 3 You'll hear the Christian shout
to wake the nations underground,
Looking to my God's right hand
when the stars begin to fall.**

PRAYER FOR HEALING

Holy God, Creator of all diversity and Ground of our being, we come before You in this season of celebration and reflection. We recognize that Black people have been part of the fabric of this land and this United Church since the beginning. Yet, we must also confess the times we have failed to honour that presence.

We confess the sin of racism that continues to live in our language, our structures, and our hearts. We lament the stories left untold and the contributions hidden behind the dominant narrative. We acknowledge that our church has often been a place where Black siblings have had to create paths where there were; and sacrifice for a freedom that remains incomplete.

We lament the fatigue of our elders and the weariness of our youth who still face systems of exclusion. We confess our complicity in the silence that allows anti- Blackness to persist.

Forgive us, O God, when we have been apathetic to the sacredness of Black lives. Open the closed corners of our minds. Help us to move beyond words into the active work of dismantling privilege, so that we may truly become an anti-racist church. Create in us new hearts that seek right relationships and the abundance of life You intended for all. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE

Hear the good news of the Gospel: God's grace is not a distant promise, but a present reality that heals and transforms. In the divine mystery, God embraces our differences and calls us into a Beloved Community, where every voice is essential and every life is cherished.

We are wonderfully and beautifully made, woven together in a tapestry of love. Through the Spirit, we are given the courage to persevere and the strength to clear the path for justice and equity.

As we celebrate the resilience and hope that define Black history in our church, from the first pews to the highest offices, know that You are loved, and You are called to the work of restoration.

We go forward with the hope of Jesus and the persistent flame of those who came before us. Thanks be to God for the dawn of a new day. Amen.

SIGN OF PEACE

One of the ways we are recognized as followers of the Way of Christ,
is by the light and love we share with one another.
It is in remembering this light and love that I say to you:

Friends, the peace of Christ be with you!
And also with you.

HYMN Hope Shines as the Solitary Star

MV 220

**Hope shines as the solitary star,
faith is the inner light,
You and I together mirror the Light of Lights,
and illumines the pathway home**

Listening for Wisdom

Theme Conversation This Little Light of Mine

GOSPEL Matthew 5:13-20

Ruth Burnett-Cole

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is God’s wisdom from our ancestors in faith.

GIFT OF MUSIC

"Like a River in my Soul"

(Traditional African-American spiritual
arranged by Tim Osiek, edited by Dan Forrest)

I've got peace like a river, like a river in my soul.
I've got peace like a river, soothing river, calmly flow.
When the world closes in, feel the stillness within.
I've got peace like a river, like a river in my soul.

I've got love like an ocean, like an ocean in my soul.
I've got love like an ocean, endless ocean, deep and full.
When you're lost and alone, let the waves bring you home.
I've got love like an ocean, like an ocean in my soul (in my soul...).

I've got joy like a fountain, like a fountain in my soul.
I've got joy like a fountain, like a fountain in my soul.

When your hope nearly dies, just remember, once again
You shall rise!
I've got joy like a fountain, love like an ocean, peace like a river,
In my soul (like a fountain, like an ocean, like a river),
In my soul.

REFLECTION

Rev. Charmain Bailey

"Here from the Beginning" is an exhibition that showcases the contributions and experiences of Black people within the church, amplifying voices that have long been overshadowed by the dominant narrative.

This is a celebration of faith, history, community and The United Church of Canada.

It was created in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the United Church. The virtual exhibition is available online at herefromthebeginning.ca and we are inviting folks from the United Church to watch the exhibition for black history month this year.

In our scripture of Matthew 5: 13-20 tells a similar story that the exhibition tells. Jesus stands on a hillside and looks out at an ordinary crowd.

Not leaders.
Not scholars.
Not the powerful.
And he says something astonishing:
“You are the salt of the earth.
You are the light of the world.”
Not *you will be*.
Not *try to become*.
But *you are*.

Before credentials.
Before permission.
Before recognition.

That matters for how we understand Black History Month, and for how we tell the story of the church.

Salt Doesn't Announce Itself
Salt doesn't draw attention to itself.

You only notice it when it's missing.
It preserves.
It brings out flavour.
It makes food worth eating.

Jesus says when salt loses its saltiness, it stops doing what it was made to do, not because it's bad, but because it's lost its purpose.

How does this parallel with 'Here from the Beginning?'
Well, Black people were not added later to the life of our church.
We were not guests.
We were not an optional extra.
We were salt from the very beginning,
shaping worship, leadership, justice movements, theology, and community life.

And for a long time, the church benefited from that salt
without naming it,
without honouring it,
sometimes without even noticing it.

Jesus goes on:

“No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket.”

Light is meant to be seen.

But history tells us that Black leadership, Black faith, and Black spiritual wisdom were often pushed to the margins,

kept out of sight,

kept out of official stories,

kept out of decision-making spaces.

Not because the light wasn't there,

but because it made some people uncomfortable.

Black History Month is not about adding light.

It's about removing the basket so the light can be seen and felt.

This isn't just about history.

It's about faithfulness.

Jesus doesn't say, “Be salt someday.”

He says, “You are salt.”

Jesus doesn't say, “Try to be light if it's safe.”

He says, “You are light.”

The problem is never the lack of light.

The problem is whether we choose to see it.

So we have to ask ourselves, honestly and without defensiveness:

Whose gifts have we benefited from without fully recognizing?

Whose voices have shaped the church but not the records?

Where have we been comfortable with good intentions but slow to change structures?

Jesus says he has not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

Fulfillment doesn't erase the past.

It tells the truth about it.

The exhibit doesn't ask us to feel guilty.

It asks us to be truthful.

Because a church that tells the whole story is a church that grows stronger,
more honest,
and frankly, more alive.

Salt only works when it's mixed in.
Light only works when it's allowed to shine.
So Black History Month cannot be just about remembering.
It has to shape who we are becoming.

If Black people were here from the beginning,
then Black voices belong at the center now,
in leadership,
in theology,
in decisions about the future of the church.
This is not charity.
It is obedience to Jesus' own words.

The good news is this:
The light is still shining.
The salt is still doing its work.
The story is still being written.

And when the church chooses truth over comfort,
visibility over silence,
and justice over nostalgia,
it becomes what Jesus imagined it could be.

Salt of the earth.
Light of the world.
Not someday.
From the beginning, from the start of it all.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Responding in Thanksgiving

HYMN We're the Light of All the World

TLUS 30

**We're the light of all the world, we are a city on a hill,
We're a candle on a stand, proclaiming light,
We will not hide our lamp beneath a bushel anymore,
We will shine a ray of hope that's burning bright.**

**We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace
For the flood of tears will fin'ly cease to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky,
Paint the world in colours proud and hold and free.**

**My coat of many colours, sewn from many diff'rent threads,
Cov'ring all in warmth, in welcoming and in grace,
God said :Let there be light," created every varied shade,
In the rainbow each of us can find a place.**

**We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace
For the flood of tears will fin'ly to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky,
paint the world in colours, proud and bold and free.**

**We're the hope to still believe in tomorrow's better day,
We are peace in a world that's torn apart,
We are joy that will last in all the struggles that we face
As the mourning night of tears breaks into day.**

**We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace,
For the flood of tears will fin'ly to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky,
Paint the world in colours, proud and bold and free.**

**We're the face of storms of life, we will never be alone,
For our God will be with us on the way,
Here we are, side by side, we won't be frightened any more,
As the mourning night if tears breaks into day.**

**We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace,
For the flood of tears will fin'ly to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky,
Paint the world in colours, proud and bold and free.**

INVITATION TO GIVE

Let us celebrate how others have been Christ to us. Let us celebrate that we have been Christ to us. Let us celebrate that we have the opportunity to be Christ for others. Let us once again commit our time, talent, and treasure to God's love for all!

**All is giv'n for the glory of God.
Amen! Amen!
All depends upon our glorious God.
Amen! Amen!
Amen! Amen! Amen!
All is giv'n for the glory of God.
Amen! Amen!**

OFFERING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for the opportunities to be your presence, your attentiveness, and your message of love. Thank you for making us a community and for sharing our gifts in the community around us. Thank you for this particular community. Bless all we give, and all we receive, and bless all people with your loving words. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Light of Christ

Gathering

**Light of Christ shine in and through me,
Light of Love be with me now.
Take these hands, healing hands.
Light of Christ flow through me now.**

PRAYER OF JESUS

**Our Mother and Father
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.**

Sent by the Spirit

HYMN

Siyahamba

VU 646

- 1 We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching, (marching, we are marching,) we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching, (marching, we are marching,) we are marching in the light of God.
- 2 Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',
siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos'.
Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',
siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',
Siyahamba, (hamba siyahamba,) siyahamb', ekukhanyen' kwenkhos'.
Siyahamba, (hamba siyahamba,) siyahamb', ekukhanyen' kwenkhos'.

SENDING FORTH

Go now from this place, carrying both the weight of the past and the hope of the future.
Go to be ambassadors of peace and reconciliation.
Go to disrupt those who are comfortable and comfort those who mourn.

Go as salt of the earth, preserving what is sacred, bringing out what is good, and refusing to let justice lose its flavor.
Go as light of the world, shining truth in places where shadows linger, and refusing to hide the hope that has been entrusted to you.

May the God of our ancestors hold you in your pain.
May Jesus the Christ, our brother, give you the resilience to stand firm against injustice.
And may the Holy Spirit, who binds us together, enliven your hope as we march toward the Beloved Community.

SUNG AMEN

VU 969 (Kriewald)

End of Worship – Beginning of Service

We welcome you and thank you for joining us this morning.

Please join us in Fraser Hall following the service for coffee and fellowship.

To view the Black history month video, **Here From The Beginning**, go to
<http://herefromthebeginning.ca>.

Rev. Charmain Bailey is a Diaconal Minister serving Cooks and Mount Brydges United Churches in Antler River Watershed Region.

Rev. Lisa Byer-de Wever is a Diaconal Minister serving Merging Waters United Church in Conseil Regional Nakonha:ka- Shining Waters Regional Council.

MUSICAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Today's Instrumental Music

"O What Sorrow, O What Joy" is the first movement ("Ni Huzuni, Ni Furaha") of Three African Tunes for Organ (2003) by Carl Reine, a Seattle composer who celebrates global diversity with settings of world music for organ and other instruments. This movement is from a Tanzanian Haya-language hymn by Joas Kijugo. It incorporates an asymmetric metre in an attempt to capture the additive, non-binary rhythms of African drumming.

"Idyll," highlighting the organ's solo clarinet stop, is by Norman Warren (1934-2019), English composer, author, theologian, and Anglican priest.

"Toccata" is by Andrew Gant (b. 1963), British composer, author, teacher and politician.

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