General Synod 35: Into the Deep

Opening Worship “Planting Sweetgrass” | Friday, July 11, 2025
Kansas City, Missouri

Preludes

Praise Him

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Great Is Thy Faithfulness

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Sweetgrass Storytelling: Planting Sweetgrass

All Belong Here

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Procession/Drum March

GS Youth and Children Participants
Council of American Indian Ministry
United Black Christians
Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries
The Collectivo
United Samoan Ministry
UCC Disability and Mental Health Networks
Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers
Gender Justice and Our Whole Lives
Honored Guests
General Synod Leadership
United Church of Christ Board Leadership
GS Preachers
Officers of the United Church of Christ

Entry into Worship and Land Acknowledgement

All:
We stand here as a united and uniting church, knowing that whatever space you have come from, no matter who you are or how you identify, no matter who you love, there is space for you here and now.

We stand here today on land that is God's. We stand here today on land that wasn't for the taking or misuse. We remember…

CAIM:
Much as the colonizers of this county named the communities, they formed on this stolen land we now stand upon, the word Missouri comes from the language of an Indigenous Nation which belonged to the Siouan linguistic stock.

We acknowledge that Indigenous People have lived on this land for time immemorial, despite genocide, ethnic cleansing and forced removal, and to this current time honor it as our homeland. Indeed, I am living proof of that fact, as I am a proud enrolled member of the Ho-Chunk Nation. Indigenous People are not a past part of history, but we exist and serve our people even today. As a wise Lakota woman and Christian Theologian has said "We are the results of our ancestors' dreams," and as such play a vital role in the future of this land and the United Church of Christ.

Let us continue to honor this land, to celebrate those ancestors who were here first, and who are represented by current and future generations. I challenge you to ask yourselves, “How can I support and honor Indigenous People?”

All: May we take root in God’s holy covenant, knowing that the vine of Christ is forever connected to each one of its branches and desires each of their well-being.

Prayer of Invocation
Spirit of the Skies and Seas, as we abide in your Divine Creation, we know that you blessed all of your artistry, from plants taking root to the birds of the air and from the rivers and lakes to the humans who walk upon our planet. May we see the holy connection between us, you, and all of creation. May we never cease to beautify your Realm of nature, and may our senses give gratitude for the wonderment of your creation. Amen.

Music

"Prayer of Protection"

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Prayer of Reconciliation
One: Beloved in Christ, through the nurturing grace of God…

The earth weeps for its companion as it no longer hugs the roots that have left the ground. Deep within the earth they accompanied one another. Soil breathes life into the roots of the plant.

Roots have been yanked from the ground as the sweetgrass yearns for the times it was once connected to the earth. Diasporas spread people across the earth like in the days after Babel. Exile kept people from their homeland, oppression drove many away. People stolen from their communities, some made to march to their graves.

All:
For the times we chopped what is not ours
For the moments we yanked the fruit of the fields
For the days we charred the ground of the stories of the past
For the seasons we worked to silence the wind.

For our place in destroying creation
For our place in building empires where neighborhoods once thrived
For our place in crushing the spirits of our kin
And for the times we turned our faces away,
Forgive us, Spirit of Love.

Bond us together.
Root us in community
Nourish us and our relationships.
Divine Roots of Peace. Amen.

Call to Offering
Ecclesiastes 3 says that "there is a time to plant." On this day, we awoke to the Spirit of Sowing, asking us to invest our time planting a church for the future and seeking ways to nurture the soil with our talents. In this moment, we are called to contribute our treasures, believing that, in time, the roots will break forth from the seeds and bond with the soil surrounding it. With time and care, we will rejoice in the fruits of our labors. For all the energy we invest, we sense the Spirit as we plant with the future in mind.

HYMN

We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky

We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky Composer/Arranger: Robert Lowry
We cannot own the sunlit sky, the moon, the wild-flowers growing,
For we are part of all that is within life's river flowing.
With open hands receive and share the gifts of God's creation,
That all may have abundant life in every earthly nation.

When bodies shiver in the night and weary wait for morning,
When children have no bread but tears, and war horns sound their warning.
God calls humanity to awake, to join in common labor,
That all may have abundant life, oneness with their neighbor.

God calls humanity to join as partners in creating
A future free from want o fear, Life's goodness celebrating,
That new world beckons from afar, Invites our shared endeavor
That all might have abundant life and peace endure forever.

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Blessing of the Gifts

Beloved God of Sky and Soil,
May the seeds collected this day take root in soil rich with our hope and love. May roots make their way from these seeds, soaking in the soft rains of our faith. May branches and leaves reach for the sunshine of joy as we vision a day when our energies will create the Realm of God here on earth. Bless our gifts, our hopes, and our dreams, Holy One. Amen.

Scripture Luke 5: 1-4

5 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. 2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.
4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Sermon: Rev. Marilyn Pagán-Banks

Reflection

One: Our plants no longer live with the ground. Its roots miss the times of old, its companion, the ground which used to surround it with a hug.

We cannot go back, only forward. We cannot paint over the past, but shine a light to reveal its story. Instead, we take the sweetgrass separated from the ground, and we create something beautiful.

We take the remnants, and build something that represents hope.
We bless the plants, and answer the call to create in our world.

All: As the sweetgrass is braided, we pray the Christ's love connects us to creation, rooting us in community.
As the sweetgrass is braided, we pray that God's peace winds across the earth:
As the sweetgrass is braided, we pray the Spirit's hope fills our hearts.

CLOSING HYMN

Love Is Greater Than Fear

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Benediction

GS35 Closing Worship was written by Rev. Michelle Torigian (she/hers), Pastor, St. Paul UCC, Belleville, Il.

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