

Creative Spirit of God:  
Come as the earth and sustain us.  
Come as the wind and stir us.  
Come as fire and transform us...until we are all yours.  
We pray through Jesus who is our Christ, our healer, and our redeemer.

May the words of my mouth  
And the meditation of our hearts  
Be acceptable to you  
O, my God.

The function of a yoke is important in the history of humanity.

In ancient days the yoke was used to link two draught animals thus directing more power to the task. It increased our food yield and made our work more effective.

Individual yokes were used to balance loads and redistribute the weight of burden to the hips and legs from the arm sockets and back. The device allowed a greater weight capacity and longer trips.

The industrial age saw the re-invention of the yoke as a way to redistribute power from an engine to a tool. Whether, as part of a drive shaft to wheels or as a PTO on the back of a tractor, the yoke directs power from the engine to the application.

The Ross Yoke is a clever mechanical invention. It is basically a triangle anchored at the midpoint along the base. Attachments on the wings allow pistons to work together to direct the work of the device. It is what makes a gear driven time piece function or the pistons in an engine cooperate.

In the digital age, a yoke is the steering device used to fly planes and direct computer games.

The power held by this little word is worthy to be part of sacred text and scripture. It is vital to our spiritual formation.

From our Jewish roots we inherit, "the yoke of heaven." Reciting or living out the *Shema* is called, "accepting the yoke of the kingdom of heaven." Do we remember the *Sema Yisrael*?

- *Šěma* : *listen*, or *hear and do* (according to the [Targum](#), *accept*)
- *Yisrā'el*: Israel, in the sense of the people or congregation of Israel
- *Ādōnāy*: often translated as "LORD", it is read in place of [YHWH](#)
- *Ēlōhēnū*: the plural 1<sup>st</sup> person possessive of אֱלֹהִים *Ēlōhîm*, meaning "our God".
- *Eḥād*: the Hebrew word which has the dual meaning "one" and "a unison", its root is also "unique".

"Hear O Israel, YHWY, our God is One."

This is the heart of monotheism and the basis of Jesus answering when asked, "what is the greatest commandment"

"Love YWHY your God with all your heart and soul and mind and the second is unto it – love your neighbor as your self."

In our Baptism we are, "yoked" with Christ who calls us to love.

By our baptism we are, "yoked" into the family of Christ. We are brought into communion and invited to share our life together in community or *Koininia*.

Yoked with Christ, you and I are invited to never endure, strive, suffer, or celebrate alone. Yoked in the family of Christ invites us to share our efforts, directed for the most effect.

In times of challenge – spiritual, emotional, physical, or economic – we share the effort, the knowledge, and the compassion that is required to thrive. In the yoke of the family of Christ we can discover that which is needed. God has graced the Yoked *Koininia* with the gifts, talents, insights, inspiration, imagination and experience sufficient for every need.

Some of us were in a training several weeks ago. We were asked to share why we were in the United Methodist Church. A young woman spoke right up saying:

“I was in Salt Lake City, homeless and alone, and very pregnant. It was the United Methodist Church downtown that took me in. Made sure I had the right food for my baby. Provided a safe place to be, and when it was time to move to California, they made a way for me to come.”

O, brothers and sisters – putting on the yoke of Christ gives us what we need to be a witness to the love of God – Amen?

Yoked with Christ, invites us to share in the intimacy of bearing witness to the gospel by sharing with God in the suffering of the world.

Praise God.

I know you have known the grace of the yoke of Christ.

- A rummage sale cannot happen without that yoke. A Treasure sale is a group effort – it is sharing the effort and laughter and joy and when it is all over the tired mussels, aching feet, and clean up relief. It is a yoked effort which allows shared energies to be directed for holy effectiveness.
- In time of loss and grief, the yoked family of Christ is grace incarnate. Together we share in loss and share in celebration.

Together we remember.

Together we carry the wisdom, affection, and blessing of the one who has gone on, into the future of our yoked fellowship.

Together we share with each other the gentle and powerful truth of our faith:

*God so loves you and me that God takes up even death and makes of it a new beginning.*

- The Yoke of the Family of Christ nurtures us in faith. Spiritual formation is inextricably joined with *Koinonia* and our *Koinonia* is communion by intimate participation in Christ.

Yoked-with-Christ, invites us into an intimate relationship of respect, courage, integrity and compassion.

Yoked-with-Christ, will challenge us, push us, stretch us, mold us, form and inform us. This intimate relationship in the family of Christ invites us to listen deeply to one another and to those around us. And then, together, to share in the work of healing hurts and living hope.

Yoked-with-Christ, is sharing life with brothers and sisters and the great cloud of witnesses that have come before even as it joins our love and compassion to generations yet unborn.

In the United Methodist Connection we live out the Yoke of Christ in communion with those beyond our congregation. Together with congregations all over the world we share the yoke of Christ in mission and ministry. We live out our calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World in communion with millions of others. We are not isolated – praise God. Such a yoke allows us to be present in times of crisis and rebuilding. But more importantly it is an intimate presence of compassion and caring.

- Today there are work teams of United Methodists in Biloxi, Mississippi rebuilding homes and lives – they are part of us.
- This hour there are volunteers in Haiti working to save lives, plan for the future, and help suffering people – they are us.
- Right this minute there are workers in refugee camps all over the world distributing health kits assembled by United Methodist congregations to children and women and men who have fled the violence of their homes – and they are us. Such is the wonder and miracle of the yoke of Christ.
- This summer children from around our Annual Conference will participate in Urban Kids camp. They will experience the healing and inspiring power of Christ's love because we share through the yoke of Christ.
- This year a hundred people will come together in a camp called Strength for the Journey. There, those who are trying to live with the HIV infection will experience the redemptive, life affirming power of Christ - because we have put on the yoke of Christ.

O sisters and brothers, hear anew the invitation of Jesus: <sup>28</sup>*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* <sup>29</sup>*Take my*

*yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Today I join you in saying, "yes." Yes, to the Yoke with Christ at work here in the family of Christ called University United Methodist Church in Redlands.

As we come to the table of Christ,  
and share the grace of sacrament,  
may God,  
in Jesus our Christ,  
through the power of the Holy Spirit  
bless our ministry together  
today, and in the years to come.

May the church say, "Amen."

REVEREND FLOYD McKEITHEN

JULY 3, 2011