Chorus:  God of the stars  
(see music at end of service)

Call To Worship  
(based on Eccl 3:1, Mark 1:15, and Gal 6:9)

One:  The Teacher said: To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.

All:  This is a time for worship – this is a season to consider God’s blessings.

One:  Jesus said: The time is up! The Kingdom of God is right next to us!

All:  This is the time for God’s realm to be made visible, with us, through us, around us!

One:  The Apostle said: Let us not grow weary in doing right, for when the season is ripe we will reap bountifully if we don’t give up.

All:  Working together in God’s service we can shoulder the load, gather in the harvest, all in due season, all in God’s time.

One:  Come, let us gather together in the name of the One beyond time, present in all seasons, visible in all hearts.

Unison Invocation

All:  We come together to worship, travelling as many paths as there are faces present here today! For some of us it has been a hectic time. Others among us have experienced peace. Some of us have groaned a good deal in getting ready. Others among us move easily. Some of us bear emotional, physical, or spiritual burdens. For still others the journey has meant light burdens and a light heart.

In each of us the rhythms of life have made themselves felt in our journey of faith and discipleship. Together, in faithful worship of God, our rhythms undergird one great music of faithfulness and love.

God, the great composer of the rhythms of our lives, the author of the song we are living, write a new stanza in the lyric of our lives together, as we celebrate the passage of the seasons of life. Amen.

Hymn of praise:  God of our life  
Hymnal: A Worship Book #486
**Prayer of Confession  (listen)**

God of all seasons, God in and beyond time, present in the Word made Flesh, we come before you as a people who share a multitude of experiences, arriving from a variety of backgrounds, fully aware of the truth of your scripture, that to everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven. Yet despite this truth we complain because we dwell in one season of life and not another.

When we are young we strive to look and act older. When we are older we pretend it is possible for us to look and act younger. When we ought to be silent we speak. When we are led by your Spirit to speak we are silent. When the sorrows of this world beg for us to weep with your suffering people we laugh it off, and when your joy lifts up your people even in the midst of hardship we frown and demand that all should look solemn. We complain about those who wail. We complain about those who dance.

Lord of life and death, sovereign of seedtime and harvest, grant us the wisdom that in all seasons we might be your people, witnessing to your love, sharing in your work, bearing each other’s weakness. So that in war and in peace, where there is love and where there is hate, we might always strengthen the weak in good time and serve you by serving the hungry, the thirsty, then naked, the imprisoned, and the sick in all seasons.

These things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

*One:* In birth and in death we praise you, because you are present in all the rhythms of life.

*All:* While the seed sleeps in the earth, when the tomato vine is bent from the weight of the bright fruit, we thank you with grateful praise.

*One:* Where there is harm, call us to be present, that healing in its time may return, and all may raise their hands and hearts in thanksgiving.

*All:* When it is time for the tearing down may our hands stack the bricks, that we may also be busy in building new ministries.

*One:* May we cry with those who weep, rejoice with those who laugh,

*All:* Throwing and gathering stones

*One:* Recognizing boundaries, embracing in due season,

*All:* Seeking, losing, keeping, and discarding, and in all things thanking you, seeing you in every good purpose, seeking you and aiding you when it is your will to restore and renew.

*One:* When our hearts are torn in grief, when our lives are reassembled after the dark night is past and joy is renewed with the morning,

*All:* When it is your will we are silent, when it is your will we speak out,

*One:* When we love, when we hate the evil that destroys life and seek to conquer it in love,

*All:* In war, in peace,

*One:* In war, bringing peace

*All:* thanking you in time and season for your presence, hear us, receive our heartfelt thanksgiving, bless us with perspective, love, and hope. Amen.
Hymn of Peace:  

We are people of God’s peace  

Hymnal: A Worship Book #407

Offering Meditation  (listen)

The teacher tells us there is a time to be born and a time to die. We don’t have to be morbid or gloomy to know that we all have a limited time, and there’s no telling how much time we have. Like the poet Andrew Marvell said, “But at my back I always hear, Time’s winged chariot drawing near….”

But what if we didn’t have to think about dying? In a short story titled “The Martyr” by Alan E. Nourse, a few especially talented or gifted individuals are given expensive medications to lengthen their lives. A senator begins an investigation to find out why this serum isn’t given to all, but what he discovers is that the composer in a search for perfection never quite completes his composition. The inventor never finishes an invention. The immortals are accomplishing little or nothing. Without death there seems to be no incentive to get the most out of life.

In our time of offering we need to remember that the only time we can count on is now! This is our opportunity to make a difference in our congregation, in our community, in our world, through our offerings of our wealth, our effort, and our will to be good disciples in the name of Jesus.

Offering Sentence  (listen)

To everything there is a season. This is our time for the purpose of changing the world in God’s name.

Offering Prayer  (listen)

Receive, Gracious God, giving of all good things, what we have given in your name, for your work, with your heart. In each proper time and season lead those who receive these gifts to use them for your glory. Amen.

Scripture:  

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Message:  

Rhythms of Life: for everything there is a season….

Sermon Starter  (ideas to help you write your own sermon)

The 80’s series ALF concerns a very annoying (if cuddly looking) alien that is sheltered by an average suburban family. In one episode ALF is surprised to learn that the death of an uncle caught the family by surprise. On his planet everyone dies at the same age and everyone takes comfort in knowing how much longer they have to live. At the end of the episode ALF confides he could not stand living without knowing when he would die. The family’s dad, however, responds that he couldn’t stand living knowing when he would die.
For the author of Ecclesiastes, often simply called The Teacher, this famous list of life’s happenings that comes from this very beloved passage in Ecclesiastes, begins with the one thing over which we have no control – when we are born, and when we die. An insurance agent’s actuarial table can suggest what the odds are that we will live another fifty, twenty, or ten years, but no one knows precisely what our particular life span will be. This knowledge that we don't know, makes every day special, and gives us a sense that we ought to use wisely the gift of each precious moment.

Indeed, two sets of sayings seem to center around the time of dying. We are told there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance (vs 4)” and “a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak (vs. 7).” Most of us have lost loved ones at one time or another. We have all shared with others who have lost dear ones to death, and we know that moods can shift quickly – there is a time to hold hands, to shed a tear, or to collapse in each other’s arms in uncontrollable weeping, not unlike the grieving in Biblical times that caused people to tear their garments in anguish. Then it is suddenly time to laugh, to remember clearly the faults and foibles of someone who is gone, to see the whole picture so they continue to live in our hearts, to sew together the pieces of our lives, to love and to live again.

But this famous list also includes things we have control over. We can decide whether to keep silent or whether to speak, whether to tear or whether to sew, whether to plant or whether to harvest.

We are told in grieving there is a time to speak and a time to keep silence. When Job has lost nearly everything his three friends come and sit with him for seven days in silence. Since there are no words to make things better, their presence is a blessing. It is only when they speak that the mood is broken and things turn bitter.

But the beauty of Biblical wisdom is that we are allowed to reset these words into our own context. Throughout life there is a time to speak and a time to keep silence. And this where the special gift of being older gives some of us an advantage. Sometimes when we are younger we have to be concerned about job, family, and situation. We have to temper our reactions and withhold speech because we have others to protect. We may see injustice but find it difficult to react. It may be time for some to keep silence.

But we who are older can speak. We may be retired and no longer have a job to lose. We may have a pension that cannot be touched. Moreover, the knowledge that we will not live forever, but we still have today, gives us a sense of urgency that says today is the day to speak – to speak out in the name of Jesus against those who ignore the poor, those who do not provide benefits for their workers, those who gain riches at the expense of the poor. We can speak out against discrimination of all kinds and remind all that all are equal in God’s sight.
Speaking invigorates us. It gives us purpose. We can be the witness when those in power believe that they cannot be held to account for their sins.

Now one of the advantages of being a little older is that over the course of time we have a greater sense of how these rhythms of life work. Granted – history never exactly repeats itself, but when we have started a garden over the course of years we’ve learned we have to use our experience and good sense to choose the right date for planting. We can’t just follow the suggestion on the back of the seed packet. We’ve learned when it’s worth repairing the car, and when we’re just putting good money into bad. We know when it’s time to tear down the storage shed, and build a new one.

None of us knows the span of our days, but as we grow in wisdom we may perceive how best to use those days in service to God in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**Hymn of Service:** *Will you let me be your servant?*  
**Hymnal:** A Worship Book #307

**Commission Statement** *(listen)*

In season, in time, in all of life’s twists and turns, be present, and share God’s presence in love.

**Unison Benediction**

*All:* Go forward in God’s time,  
So that in every season  
We might in every beginning and ending  
Praise God the Creator,  
Guided by God’s Spirit,  
In the pattern of the Redeemer.  
Amen.

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*Frank Ramirez is pastor of the Union Center Church of the Brethren, Nappanee, Indiana, and is a well-known and prolific writer. He and his wife Jennie serve as volunteer staff for the denomination’s National Older Adult Conference (NOAC).*

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Encouraging individuals, families, and congregations to celebrate God’s gift of aging through the observation of Older Adult Month is a ministry of the Church of the Brethren’s Older Adult Ministry. For more information about aging:

[www.brethren.org/oam](http://www.brethren.org/oam)  
[kebersole@brethren.org](mailto:kebersole@brethren.org)  
(847) 429-4305
God of the stars

Frank Ramirez

C    F    G    C    C
God of the stars, yet God in our home, God who pre-
God who is myst-try, God who is might, God who is
God who is laugh-ter, God who is grace, God who is
God of the even-ning, God of the day, In sun-shine

C    G    C    C
God of the stars, yet God in our home, God who pre-

F    G    C    C
cedes us where ev-er we roam. God who stays
hid - den God here in sight, God who gives
found in each so - jour - ner's face, Where - ever life
or sha - dow please show us theway. God who is
cedes us where ev-er we roam. God who stays

G    F    C    C
here, yet God ev - ry - where, God, be our
gui - dance, grants us free will, God who gave
leads us, stand by our side, To you praise
breath, whose son shared our death, Will grant resur-
here, yet God ev - ry - where, God, be our

F    G    C
com - fort, God who is care.
Jesus - a - bide with us still.
and - honor what - e - ver betide.
rection and new life to - day.
com - fort, God who is care.

Frank Ramirez