

Service 2: A Local Arrangement Service

Note to leader

This can be led by a worship leader, steward or other church member. Please read it through before giving the service, as some elements are optional.

Welcome and call to worship

Welcome to worship today. We will be thinking about this year's presidential theme, 'God's Table: An invitation for all', from a global perspective.

"How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights." (Psalm 36: 7–8, NRSV)

Hymn

Choose from:

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want
(StF 481)

Give me joy in my heart (492, H&P)

Prayer of praise and confession

A prayer prepared by the Revd Sonia Hicks,
President of the Conference

Let us pray:

Holy God, you invite us, with all of creation, to praise and adore you. You call us to witness to your grace and mercy, your love and goodness. We acknowledge your loving kindness, which accompanies us through life.

Almighty God, we are astounded by your creative genius which we can see in each flower that unfolds, in every crawling and creeping thing. The whole world is full of your glory. We praise you, O God.

We acknowledge you Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our friend. You are the visible likeness of the invisible God. In your life and death, we see the greatness of God's love for us. We see clearly how amazing our God is. The Godhead humbles itself and draws near in the Son, so that we can see how majestic and how marvellous is the God of all the earth. We praise you, O God.

We acknowledge you Holy Spirit who weaves the love of God into our hearts. You who shows us the imprint of God's presence day by day. Holy Spirit you compel us to cry "Abba Father" as we are overcome with joy and laughter, with pain and sorrow. In every season of our lives, we sense the Spirit's guidance. We praise you, O God.

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be with us in worship we pray.

Amen

Loving God, you invite each of us into your presence. Forgive us when we limit that invitation to others. Forgive us when we fail to see others are you see them: children of the living God.

Forgive us when we think that our ways of thinking and being are the only ways.

Forgive us when we insist that others need to change, to adjust, but that we can remain the same.

Forgive us for stubborn hearts and unbending wills.

O God, we forget that you are always willing to meet us on the road to repentance. You journey with us and, in doing so, show us where change is possible. We see this in the way that Jesus journeyed with his disciples even as they continued to misunderstand the nature of true servanthood. May the Holy Spirit help us to remove the logs of selfishness from our hearts. May we know that only you can cleanse us, heal us and restore us.

Celebrating your forgiveness and welcome, we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who is our Lord and our Saviour.

Amen

First (all-age) address

A story from Barbara Easton, Vice-President of the Conference

When somebody asked Jesus what was the most important thing his followers could do, he said 'Love God and love other people'. That's not always easy! Sometimes it's hard to figure out what love 'looks like' in the different places that life puts us.

Every time we say the Lord's Prayer we ask God to forgive us in just the same way we forgive other people. That's hard too! What's it like to live lovingly with people who are not just different from you but are people who are your enemies?

In Japan, I met a woman who had every reason not to want to forgive. In August 1945, in the later stages of the Second World War, the Americans dropped a nuclear weapon on a city in Japan called Hiroshima. This was a terrible event – it was the first time nuclear weapons had ever been used, bringing terrible instant and ongoing effects on a massive scale from just one bomb.

Koko Kondo was the daughter of the minister of the Methodist Church in Hiroshima. She was only a toddler on the morning when the bomb fell, but she and her mum somehow survived the blast. They emerged from the wreckage of their home to a city that had been almost totally obliterated within a few moments. Over the coming years Koko spent time with many people who came to their manse for support because of the effects of the bombing. She herself suffered difficulties from the radiation – although she looked unharmed, her body would not grow properly so that, if you meet her today, you will see that she is very tiny. Later she discovered that she could not have children of her own, and her fiancé abandoned her.

As a child, Koko made a promise that if she ever met the people who did this, she would hurt them as much as she could. When she was a teenager, she went to America with her mum to be on a TV programme about the bombing. She found herself sitting a few seats away from one of the pilots of the plane that had actually dropped the bomb. Now was her chance – she wanted to "kick him and punch him and spit at him." But she thought her mum would be very upset if she did this in front of all the TV cameras, so she focused on staring angrily at him until they'd finished filming. Suddenly she noticed that there were tears streaming down his face. He was deeply troubled by what had happened in the past and his part in it and did not stop weeping for the whole programme. When it ended, Koko went over to him, but instead of hurting him she put her hand in his and they both cried together.

Koko is now a very old lady! But she has given her whole life to working for peace and travels the world to make sure that people do not turn to nuclear weapons as the answer to the problems of war. She was able to adopt children and now has a family

and grandchildren of her own. Here is a picture of her, holding the dress she was wearing when the bomb fell and her mum hung onto her as buildings fell down around them.



Note to leader

If you want to read in more detail about this inspiring Methodist, you can see her story here: www.staradvertiser.com/2020/08/04/breaking-news/urgency-to-bear-witness-grows-for-last-hiroshima-atomic-bomb-survivors/

Hymn

We sing together hymn number 440 from Singing the Faith/number 215 from Hymns and Psalms, Amazing grace - how sweet the sound (*StF* 440 or *H&P* 215)

If there is a Junior Church, dismiss them with these words:

Let us pray:

Dear God, as we learn about you in different parts of this building, may we always know you, your love, and your welcome for all. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Reading

Deuteronomy 26: 5-13

First reflection

The presidential theme this year is, 'God's table: an invitation for all'. I will now read

a reflection from Barbra Easton, Vice-President of the Conference, from her recent online visit to the Methodist Church in Peru.

When we think about 'God's table: an invitation to all', Methodists in Peru are doing a lot we might reflect on. They are a relatively small church. But what impressed me was the enormous energy they have for relating the good news to new people in whatever language best speaks to them. From the populous coast to the dense Amazon, across the range of Spanish-speaking and indigenous communities, the church reaches out and addresses the real needs of people's lives. So, in the high mountain communities, where people live above 5000 meters (that's roughly four times the height of Ben Nevis!) and it is hard to make a living, the local Methodists have been using simple green technology to adapt the houses of the elderly. By making their homes warmer they have not only made things more comfortable, but also improved people's health. That's great in itself but it also means that, in these distant and difficult to reach communities, there is less worry about finding a doctor or the expense of medicine.

I was reminded of John Wesley's driving question as he travelled to different Methodist societies in Britain: 'What is the work of God in THIS place?' Even though their numbers are few, Methodists in Peru are having a life-changing impact in their hugely diverse communities. This combination of diversity and unity is their strength, enabling them to flourish in vastly different settings, knowing they are supported and nourished by the whole Methodist family of which they are a part.

This has really come to the fore in the pandemic: Peru had a long and strict lockdown, bringing unemployment and hardship to many families.

Although church members have also been struggling, their national presence has enabled Methodists to take a lead through the speed and effectiveness of their response. Geographically (to misquote an old advert), the church 'reaches the parts that others do not reach'. Each congregation offers a base and volunteers at grassroots level, putting together food parcels for the most vulnerable, where government aid has often been slow in arriving. When I spoke with them, they had reached around 5000 clients, of whom a large percentage had disabilities. This practical help comes rooted in a strong spirituality and accompanied by a message that God is always with us, even in the darkest times. As one church leader said, "The campaign is temporary but the blessing is permanent".



Hymn

Lord, your church on earth is seeking
(*Stf 410 or H&P 774*)

Note to leader

You might also invite someone in advance to give a testimony of when they have

experienced God's welcome. You can find guidance on offering a testimony here: www.thestoryproject.org.uk/resources. Please give this to the person in good time so that they can prepare.

Reading

Mark 2: 13-22

Second reflection

I will now read a reflection from the Revd Sonia Hicks, President of the Conference, from her recent virtual visit to the Methodist Church in South Africa.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is a diverse church incorporating the Methodist Churches in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa. Many languages are spoken in the Methodist Church in Southern Africa and many ethnic groups are represented. In many ways, it is a microcosm of the kingdom of God. However, to ensure that all voices are listened to, the MCSA has drawn up a Strategy for Change. The MCSA is working to ensure that no more than 40% of its leadership is male, that women should make up another 40% of the leadership and that young people should account for 20%. This strategy is known as 40:40:20.

Such a strategy is known as positive discrimination and tries to ensure that positive steps are taken towards change in a particular context. Imagine if our Church Councils comprised of 20% of young people. What might they want to say to someone our age? Would they want us to be more intentional in our support of green issues? Would the number of car parking spaces be a

hot topic in our meetings, or would we look at greener ways of getting people to church?

The strategy for change in MCSA has not proven easy or straightforward. It has been difficult increasing the number of women and young people in leadership roles.



If we want to imagine a church where people can come unhindered to the table, then there will be challenges to overcome. Think about the sorts of people that Jesus invited to be disciples. They were very different in terms of their status and relative wealth. We can imagine that Matthew, as a tax collector, was probably wealthier before he began to follow Jesus than some of the other disciples. Perhaps Simon the Zealot saw Matthew as a collaborator. Yet Jesus invites them both. Was it that Jesus saw the potential in both of them? What is the potential in others that we must be alert to? *Note to leader: At this point, you may wish to show some or all of the video found here: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/599402325>*

Hymn

Choose from:

Let love be real, in giving and receiving
(Stf 615)

Christ, from whom all blessings flow
(H&P 764)

Offering

Introduce with the words: "Your gifts for the work of God will now be gratefully received."

Receive the offering with this prayer:

Dear God, ever present with us, we offer you

these gifts in the building up of your church and in the service of your kingdom of welcome, hope and love here and throughout your world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayers of intercession and the Lord's Prayer

Introduce by saying:

Our prayers of intercession have been prepared by the Revd Sonia Hicks, President of the Conference. When I say, 'O God, who invites us', would you please respond by saying, 'May all find a place at your table'; 'O God, who invites us'; **'May all find a place at your table'**.

Almighty God, we pray for the world, for its peoples and its governments.

We pray for your peace in every corner of the globe.

We pray for your justice as we interact with one another and that its effect can be seen in....

NAME CURRENT PLACES IN THE NEWS

O God, who invites us

May all find a place at your table.

We pray for the nation in which we live.

We pray for just laws so that we can live at peace with one another.

We pray for groups denied a voice in our society because they do not 'fit in'.

May we be willing to speak up for such people no matter what the cost.

O God, who invites us

May all find a place at your table.

We pray for all who live in poverty.

We pray for all who never have enough on the table.

We pray for those who have no one to share a meal with.

Give us a heart for the needy.

May we never be content with widening gaps between rich and poor, between the haves and the have-nots.

O God, who invites us

May all find a place at your table.

We pray for those who are bereaved...

We pray for those who are coping with broken relationships, with unemployment, with life changes that have been thrust upon them.

We remember that Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. May we not be afraid to weep with those who are weeping in our churches and in our land.

O God, who invites us

May all find a place at your table.

Finally, we pray for our own needs in a time of silence...

O God, who invites us

May all find a place at your table.

O God, who issues the invitation and prepares a table where all may come, we ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

We say together the prayer Jesus taught us, saying:

The Lord's Prayer

Note to leader: use the version your church is familiar with

Hymn

Choose from:

Sent by the Lord am I (StF 239)

Be thou my vision (H&P 378)

Benediction

We say together:

May the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore.

Amen.

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