

We will meet again!

Liturgy Resources for Churches

How shall we mark the end of the restrictions that we have been living with which have isolated many and closed the churches?

How do we engage the whole community when we are able to move forward again?

This service offers liturgical resources for churches as they seek to shape their response, and propose creating a lasting, growing memorial in the form of a community arboretum. Planting trees is an act of hope, much needed in the face of climate change, and will provide a long-lasting memorial for all that we have lived through.

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- Dreamers and Star Gazers (2017) Advent to Candlemas
- Apprentices and Eyewitnesses (2019) Lent, Holy Week and Easter
- Dancers and Wayfarers (2019) Pentecost to Christ the King

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Resources for a Thinking Church

We'll Meet Again

Lament, Celebration, Thanksgiving

A service for the whole community, to mark the opening of the churches, as we come through lockdown and the Coronavirus restrictions together.

Preparation

Once we know when the churches will be re-opened and we are able to gather again in church, as we come through lockdown and the Covid-19 restrictions together, you may like to plan a service to bring the whole community together. These three sections give a framework to acknowledge some of the different responses and experiences of this time.

You may like to contact community groups to involve them in this service, focusing on anyone particularly engaged in supporting people during the crisis.

Many churches having developed an online following while the church buildings have been closed, so you may like to arrange for this service to be livestreamed to allow as many people as possible to take part. This may be especially important if some people are still having to isolate even when the restrictions start to be relaxed.

If you can, capture some images of how life has continued through the crisis, to be used in the service.

Extend an invitation to civic figures to attend to represent different parts of the community, for example: the Mayor, Head Teacher, Doctor, Nurse, Manager of the supermarket/shop, the Police, Pharmacist, Care Home Manager, volunteers in local networks who have arranged shopping for people.

Creating a community arboretum

To mark the way we have come through together, you may like to identify a site to plant trees to create a lasting, growing memorial to these times – a statement of hope for the future, lasting beyond our lifetimes and contributing towards the repair of our climate. If there isn't space for an arboretum, you can do something similar on a

smaller scale using bulbs. There may be particular individuals that a community wants to recognise, or groups that formed to help people through the crisis, or it may be that more generic thanks are given to key workers. Whichever format you chose, a tree can be presented to people during the service, to be planted on the identified site after the service.

Welcome

When the Queen spoke to the nation in April, she finished with these words:

“This time we join with all nations across the globe in a common endeavour, using the great advances of science and our instinctive compassion to heal. We will succeed - and that success will belong to every one of us. We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again.”

Today is a landmark day, as our churches are once again able to open their doors to allow us to meet again in person.

In years to come, we will look back on these days as a moment of history, when the whole world together faced an unprecedented challenge. We will look back and remember so many who lost their lives; so many who found new ways of living, finding new priorities amid the crisis. We will look back and celebrate the way our community came together, when neighbours became friends, when strangers reached out to bring hope to the isolated. We will look back and give thanks for all who showed the best in human nature, giving so generously of themselves. Today we celebrate the opening of our churches, a landmark in the lifting of restrictions, a moment which is the beginning of the next chapter in our lives, and we thank God for the opportunity to shape our lives and our communities in new ways as we go forward together.

Opening Hymn

Gather us in – Marty Haugen

The Spirit lives to set us free – Damian Lundy

Our first thoughts are of lamentation, for all we have lost.

Lament

We begin with a time of lamentation for all that we have had to let go of, during this season of lockdown and restrictions – for the people and the activities we have lost. We light a series of candles to represent the different losses we have witnessed.

Litany of Loss

For the doctors and nurses, the care workers
and other frontline staff who have died in the line of duty
and for all who have died as a result of the Coronavirus;
for all who were not able to be present
beside someone or at a funeral,
for the funerals that have been constrained by restrictions and
for the families devastated by bereavement:

The first candle is lit by someone who has been bereaved or a local funeral director, who then says:

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear our cry!

For all who have struggled with illness
where treatment has been disrupted or postponed,
for all who have struggled with their mental health,
for all who have been lonely, isolated or afraid
for all who have missed family moments:

The second candle is lit by a local doctor or nurse, who then says:

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear our cry!

For all who have been unable to go to school,
for all who have had examinations affected by the lockdown
for children and young people who have missed their friends.

The third candle is lit by a young person, who then says:

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear our cry!

For all who have lost jobs, lost income, lost opportunities,
for all who have struggled to survive,
for all who have felt abandoned;
For the businesses that have failed and
the debts that have been incurred:

*The fourth candle is lit by someone from the business community,
who then says:*

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear our cry!

Prayer

God of our depths,
who meets us in the darkness,
in loss and disappointment,
in sadness and grief,
hear our cry now as we lament all that we have lost.
Give us confidence to bring our sadness to you,
knowing that you have wept with us,
that you meet us at our point of pain and
that you carry our cares and our grief.
As we let go of people we knew and loved
and as we feel the gap left by their death,
we acknowledge their lives with thankfulness,
entrusting them to your unfailing love.

Amen.

Prayers of Regret

During the time of crisis, we recognised the best and the worst in
ourselves, and we come before God in sorrow for our failings, to ask
forgiveness and a chance to start afresh.

For those who took advantage of others by cheating them

Lord have mercy

For the anxiety in us that led us to panic-buy and hoard

Lord have mercy

For the times we became frustrated and angry with one another.

Lord have mercy

For our fearfulness that made us think only of ourselves

Lord have mercy

Prayer of Reconciliation

God of Compassion,

you know us inside out, yet you love us,

you know the worst of us, and the best of us.

May your deep love drown all our failings,

may your tears wash away our sin,

may your living water well up in us and renew our spirit.

As we are forgiven, so may we forgive others

and reach out to be reconciled in your love.

In the power of your Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Psalm Responses (Psalm 130)

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,

Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you,

so that you may be revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord

more than those who watch for the morning,

more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

and with him is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel

from all its iniquities.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,

As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Hymn

O God our help in ages past – Isaac Watts

Restore O Lord the honour of your name – Graham Kendrick

Celebration

We turn now to a time of celebration for all that has been good in this time of crisis, for the very best in human nature, for acts of kindness, for neighbourliness and generosity.

We've asked a group of people what they felt thankful for in the crisis. Let us hear from them now!

Invite a different representative from the community to talk about each of these different aspects to be thankful for.

Neighbourliness – WhatsApp groups in the street; clapping the NHS on a Thursday; getting shopping and prescriptions for people; sharing what we have in times of scarcity. For new friendships, conversations over the fence, for seeing and knowing people, sometimes for the first time.

We sing:

Glory and gratitude and praise, now let earth to heaven raise;
Glory and gratitude and praise, these we offer to God! (John Bell)

A symbol of neighbourliness is placed on a central display.

Natural world – the opportunity for a daily walk, even in the garden; the clear skies and the quiet roads; the slow unfolding of spring flowers and new life. For gardens, parks and open spaces, for the fertility and fruitfulness of nature. For the reduction to the damage we are causing to our environment.

We sing:

Glory and gratitude and praise, now let earth to heaven raise;
Glory and gratitude and praise, these we offer to God! (John Bell)

A symbol of the natural world is placed on a central display.

Technology – the possibility for connection using so many different apps, allowing for working from home, education at home, family and friends gathering online. For the huge numbers of people who have tuned into church services online. For glimpsing new ways of living that might be more sustainable.

We sing:

Glory and gratitude and praise, now let earth to heaven raise;
Glory and gratitude and praise, these we offer to God! (John Bell)

A symbol of technology is placed on a central display.

Time – to reflect, reassess, to reset the busyness of our lives; time for family and friends, time for ourselves; time for stillness and prayer; time to step off the hamster wheel of our driven lives.

We sing:

Glory and gratitude and praise, now let earth to heaven raise;
Glory and gratitude and praise, these we offer to God! (John Bell)

A symbol of our time is placed on a central display.

There may be other things that emerge that we want to give thanks for here: invite someone to name each of these things, before singing “Glory and gratitude and praise” together and placing an appropriate symbol on the central display.

Bible Reading

Philippians 4 4-9 NRSV

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things

that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Living word of God,

Live in our lives.

Reflection

We began by acknowledging how much the Coronavirus pandemic has taken from us - people who we have lost, jobs and freedoms that have been on hold, special occasions missed. And it looks as though we may have to face an economic struggle bigger than ever before, because of the economic costs of lockdown and the restrictions to prevent spread of the virus: we may be poorer in a material sense. But that is not the whole story. We have come through this season with a heightened sense of the things that really matter - our relationships, our quality of living, our networks of care for one another and of the natural world. Embracing tough times, we have come together as a community, both locally and globally, in a way we have not known before.

So it's essential to recognise that this is not a time to go back to our old ways! There is no going back: this crisis has offered us a chance to rest our lives! It is like when a complex bit of technology has become stuck, sometimes you have to unbend a paperclip and press the reset button! We have an amazing opportunity to start again in a new way.

St. Paul, in his letter to the people of Caesarea Philippi, spoke about the "peace of God" guarding our hearts and minds. Where does that deep peace come from? Paul thinks it comes from our connection with God, our sense of being in conversation with God, of asking for what we need, of giving thanks. Peace comes as we know ourselves and one another more deeply, finding that through our experience of life we tune into God's values and recognise them as our own.

Whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise – these are the things that endure, these are the things to focus on.

So, what will you take forwards with you from today? We're going to have some time to think about this and then to share our ideas with our neighbours. I wonder what you'll take forwards...

- Perhaps a different pace of life? How will we resist the gradual slide back into being over-busy, driven, tired all the time?
- Perhaps a different sense of community? How will we stay connected with neighbours? How will we maintain a sense of belonging together and caring for one another?
- Perhaps a commitment to make time for the things that matter? How will we prioritise our faith, our friends and family and our relationship with the whole of God's creation?

Silence

What do you want to take forwards from this time?

What changes do you want to make?

You may like to play some reflective music as people consider these questions.

Conversation

We turn to our neighbours for three or four minutes, to share some of our thinking.

Hymn

All I once held dear, knowing you Jesus – Graham Kendrick

Dear Lord and Father – John Greenleaf Whittier

Thanksgiving

So we come to give thanks to God for bringing us through this crisis, and to recognise those who have done so much to help us.

Presentation of Trees

We give thanks today for all who have supported our community through this pandemic crisis. We will mark their commitment and dedication by planting trees as a living memorial, and as a statement of intent as we look to live more sustainably in the future. I'm going to invite a representative to come forward from different sectors of our community, to receive a tree that will be planted in our new community arboretum.

Emergency Services, NHS Staff, doctors, nurses, porters, cleaners, kitchen staff and administrators. Police, Fire and Ambulance services.

Care Homes, for all who have cared for vulnerable people in residential homes and in the community.

Shopworkers, supermarket staff, pharmacies, delivery workers, all who have kept us fed and supplied.

Unseen essential workers, keeping water, gas, electricity, phones, sewerage and refuse collection going.

Volunteers, doing shopping, collecting prescriptions, walking dogs, giving reassurance to those isolated at home.

There may be other people who need to be included here.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of all goodness, we thank you
for helping us through this crisis,
for holding us through tears and sorrow,
for lifting us when we were down.

God of all wisdom, we thank you,
for all that we are learning and discovering
about ourselves, our neighbours, our communities,
and for guiding us through uncertain times.

God of all creation, we thank you,
for the fertility of the natural world,
for the possibility of new growth, new life
and we pray you will help us to live
more sustainably in the future.

Blessed by God for ever. Amen.

Act of Commitment

We commit ourselves to God, to a new way of living, rooted and grounded in love, to become part of God's work for the healing of the nations. We hear of God's promised restoration in the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 41 17-20

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the Lord will answer them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

May we be rooted and grounded in God's love

For the healing of the nations

I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;

May we be rooted and grounded in God's love

For the healing of the nations

I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.

May we be rooted and grounded in God's love

For the healing of the nations

I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;

May we be rooted and grounded in God's love

For the healing of the nations

I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together,

May we be rooted and grounded in God's love

For the healing of the nations

so that all may see and know,
all may consider and understand,
that the hand of the Lord has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it.

May we be rooted and grounded in God's love

For the healing of the nations

Hymn

Let us build a house where love can dwell – Marty Haugen
Longing for light – Bernadette Farrell

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for all who continue to work
to protect us from the Coronavirus,
for scientists working towards an inoculation,

for the NHS continuing to care for those who become unwell
and for nations still facing the worst of the crisis;
we pray for fair sharing of resources
as treatment becomes available.

May the peace of God

Guard your hearts and minds

We pray for our Queen and royal family
and all in government, throughout the world,
as they make decisions about our future direction;
for all economists and all in industry and business
who seek to repair the damage done to our economies;
we pray for a future where inequality is reduced.

May the peace of God

Guard your hearts and minds

We pray for our communities
as we seek to recover from lockdown and restrictions;
we pray for small businesses and local jobs,
for our local services and authorities;
we pray that the networks of care that we have established
may continue to deepen.

May the peace of God

Guard your hearts and minds

We pray for children returning to school,
people returning to work,
and for all of us as we move forward,
that we may hold on to some of the new priorities
and possibilities we have discovered.

May the peace of God

Guard your hearts and minds

We pray for all who are still struggling with this virus
and for all who have had other treatment delayed;
we pray for all who have struggled with mental illness,
loneliness or distress through the weeks of isolation;
we pray for all who have died
and for their families and friends

who have been unable to mark their death properly.
May the peace of God
Guard your hearts and minds

Lord's Prayer

**Our 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,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Blessing

God of compassion,
we bring to you our grieving:
bless us with your healing love.
God of wisdom,
we bring to you our learning:
bless us with the energy of change.
God of new beginnings,
we bring to you our future:
bless us with your vision of sustainable life.
May the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn

Lord, for the years – Timothy Dudley Smith
Here on the threshold of a new beginning - Timothy Dudley Smith
Trees are planted after the service.

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Glory and gratitude and praise – John L Bell

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