A service of peaceful Remembrance

You will need an equal number of red and white poppies, enough for the congregation to be able to have one of each colour,(white poppies available from the Peace Pledge Union: http://www.ppu.org.uk/whitepoppy ). You will also need some small ‘ties’ such as those for sandwich bags, which will be used to tie the poppies together.

Outline:

Call to Worship:
Hymn
Prayer

Introduction to the Theme
Hymn

Offering and Dedication:
Readings:
Hymn

Sermon/Address

Act of Remembrance
Prayers
The Lord’s Prayer
Hymn

Blessing

Call to Worship:  Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34)

Hymn:

Prayer: God of love and peace, we gather today to affirm your love for us and our love for one another.

We praise you for this beautiful earth, teeming with rich and diverse life. You have made for us a place with enough room for all and enough resources for all. Your world provides us with all we need . Yet, too often, we mar this beauty with our own selfishness and ignorance.

We forget that we are your people; a people you love, have forgiven and set free. So, in a moment of silence, we bring to you those things for which we want to say, “I’m sorry.”
Silence

This is Good News. While we were still far off God came to us in Jesus. In Jesus, God says, “Your sins are forgiven,” and also says, “Follow me.” Thanks be to God. AMEN.

Introduction to the Theme: See appendix i) for where children are present or ii) if no children are present.

Hymn:

Offering and Dedication: Let us pray: Loving God you offer peace and prosperity; may these gifts of money honour your work and serve your purposes and may we strive to do the same. AMEN.

Readings: Isaiah 25:1-9 and Matthew 5:1-12

Hymn

Sermon/Address:

Act of Remembrance, (in silence)

After a brief time of stillness, people are invited to come forward and take two poppies, one of each colour, and one of the wire ‘ties’. They return to their seats and tie the two poppies together. When everyone is ready, the leader reads the following:

Let the poppies in our hands stand for justice and peace. As we remember today all whose lives have been marred by war, oppression and conflict, let us remember that justice and peace are intertwined and in our own hands.

Prayers: “A Prayer in Remembrance,” by Kate Compston – see page 37 of Beyond Our Tears, Resources for a time of Remembrance, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland; ISBN 085169-286-9

The Lord’s Prayer

Hymn

Blessing

Appendix i) Tell the story or stories of one or two animals who have been awarded the Dickin medal. (Bravery award given to animals). If you are able you could show pictures; Sadie, a black Labrador was awarded her medal for bravery in Afganistan is particularly photogenic. You can find her story and many others at: http://www.pdsa.org.uk/about-us/animal-bravery-awards

When you have told the story/stories ask the young people if they knew that animals have been used in war and by peacekeepers. Is this a good idea? Why or why not?

We are meeting today to remember; to remember those who have lost their lives in conflicts. Ask the young people why it is important to remember.

You could also use the following resource: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03g6vph
Appendix ii) You could read an extract from Private Peaceful by Michael Morpurgo: Here is a brief précis I wrote for my website that you are welcome to use:

A brief bit of background. The play is set in June 1916. Tommo is about 19 years of age, a young man from Devon, and he has been fighting the, ‘war to end all wars,’ since he lied about his age and joined up. We meet him on the evening before the dawn on which he will be shot, by his own side, after a Courts Martial verdict. The play takes us, hour by hour, through the major events of Tommo’s short life before it is so cruelly and unjustly taken from him.

One of Tommo’s musings has him asserting that he doesn’t believe in God. He remembers sitting in church, staring up at the stained glass window where Jesus hung on the cross, and he remembers thinking that there couldn’t be a God – for what God would allow His Son to be so cruelly and unjustly murdered? See the link? Yes, I hope you do. The theme is revisited when Tommo’s big brother, Charlie is given Field Punishment No 1, tied to a gun wheel, and Tommo thinks, “He looked like Jesus on the cross.” When, later on Charlie is seriously wounded in combat, it is Tommo’s refusal to leave him that gets him put on the charge that will lead to his own death.

Within the nugget of this one boy’s life, the tragedy of all war is brought sharply home to us. This boy, this son of God, is a beloved child. His ordinariness means that his death is destined to become a statistic – one of the tools that allows war to be argued for, (one dies that many will be saved etc), but WE know him now. We have seen who he is, a loving and lovable boy who loves his family, his home, his country. A boy who so loves his brother that he will risk his life to save him. No wonder so many people ask, “where is God in all this?” This is Tommo’s big question. Tommo says he doesn’t believe in God, yet he also says he wants to believe in Heaven. Tonight, his last night on earth, he wants to believe that there is more to life than all he has yet seen or known.

Charlie, Tommo and all the other young men who died as a result of the war, all had their stories and I dare say if we heard them, we would be even more appalled at the loss. So the question, “Where is God in all this? ” or the similar, “Why does God allow such suffering?” deserve serious consideration. If I’m asked the first question, my answer is, “right beside the young men who died.” I say this because I believe that God was right there with Jesus at the cross as he drew his last breath – and yes, I know Jesus called out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” but that wasn’t because God wasn’t there, it was because all the hurt and pain and darkness that engulfed Jesus at that point, obscured his view. Jesus couldn’t see God through all the darkness of human suffering and sin. Jesus’ quoting from the Psalms, cried out, just as so many people still do today.

The second point, about why God ‘allows’ suffering – particularly the extreme suffering that comes with war – is, perhaps a bit more tricky to answer, but here goes. Many, many people ask this, and I write with a bit of trepidation, as I am no world authority and I certainly don’t claim to have all the answers – but here goes. I don’t think God ‘allows’ anything. Human beings have an amazing propensity to ‘do their own thing.’ This would be Free Will, if you like. If we lived in a world where God made us obey God’s will, then we would be slaves, possibly servants, of God, in a world which would look very different from this one. I don’t know how it would look, but since, “God’s ways are not our ways,” I’m pretty sure it would be very, very different. If I was guessing, I’d hazard a guess that no one would be hungry; no one would be unjustly treated; it would not make any difference what colour your skin is, or whether you’re male or female, gay or straight; no one would be richer or poorer than another – you get the gist. It would be different. We have rejected God’s ways over and over. We don’t seem to be happy with our God given diversity or difference. Bottom line – wars are caused by human beings and are not sanctioned and supported by God. Tommo discovers, when he meets a young German soldier, that he prays to the same God as the English soldiers pray to!
A great deal of human suffering is caused by human selfishness. Hunger, Climate Change, (and all associated problems), lack of access to clean water; lack of medicines and clothing; slavery – all these are caused, not because God allows it, but because we perpetrate the actions that sustain it. We prop up and support the systems that would destroy abundant life – no, our ways are not God’s ways.

What happened to the young men who shared Tommo’s fate was shameful. It took until 2007 for the 306 British soldiers who died by firing squad, to be posthumously pardoned.

Tommo’s story is, above all, a story of love. From the earliest scene, where a reluctant young Tommo is led to his first day of school and meets Molly, whom, he says, “He will love until the day he dies,” to the later scenes where he reads a letter from his beloved Molly, (now married to Charlie), and kisses it, Tommo’s love is bigger than the biggest of wars. For those of us who proclaim that, ‘God is love,’ Tommo is a beloved child of God who lives an ordinary life in extraordinary circumstances. The play is moving precisely because love is stronger than the evil and hate, epitomised in war.