**Harvest Service for Commitment for Life**

**Love in Action**

Introduction

Dear Commitment for Life Supporter

Thank you for sharing this Service of Worship resource for harvest. Please feel free to use as much or as little as you need, and to change things to suit your context.

Jesus often shared meals and enjoyed doing so. Harvest time is or at least ought to be a joyful time of sharing! If nothing else, have fun during your service so that you encourage an atmosphere of celebration and thankfulness for God’s free gifts of bread and wine… and everything from apricots to zucchinis.

Out theme is ‘Love in Action’ and we want to focus our attention on Zimbabwe given that Kevin has just returned from his visit to that wonderful country. We invite you to pray, listen and think about how we can offer our love in action for that beloved region of the world.

Explanation

We hope and trust that you find what you need for your Harvest service in this resource. There are pictures that you are free to use, prayers, sermon ideas, and hymn suggestions. There is a suggested Order of Service, but again treat it as a mere suggestion.

You may wish to place Commitment for Life giving envelopes in the pews before the service begins, but we suggest that you don’t allow the act of giving money to become the highlight – much better that this be a commitment towards Love in Action in the myriad creative ways that the Spirit is so eager to bring!

Do try to encourage conversation too – you could come up with open questions on your text and sermon ideas.

Also, why not think about hosting a meal? What a great way to celebrate this year’s harvest. And if you ensure that Fairtrade products are visibly purchased and used, you are already demonstrating Love in Action without even saying a word.

Do contact Suzanne Pearson if you want additional resources for to enhance the experience of your service – suzanne.pearson@urc.org.uk

Welcome!

‘And the trees of the fields shall clap their hands!’ declares the author in Isaiah 55. Well, if there is one time of the year that all of creation rejoices, then surely that time is harvest.

Welcome to our Commitment for Life service of worship! Let’s use Isaiah 55 as our call to worship!

Call to Worship Isaiah 55 various vv:

Hey! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come and buy wine and milk without money and without price.
**2**Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?... **12** For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Let’s worship God as we sing

*See Hymn Selection*

Opening Prayer

God of Love in Action this harvest, as we come together with one another in joy, we thank you for the abundance of your provision. We have gathered in so many gifts this year that you have freely given. We have been blessed, and we want to celebrate and praise you for all you have given. We desire earnestly to thank and bless you through the way that we respond to the needs that we see in our world, in Jesus’ name. Help us to open our hearts to the Word, and to the stories of love and grace that are shared today. Amen.

All Age Activity

**Props in bag: balloon, invitations, cake, decorations, present etc.**

Have you thrown a party? What do you need for a party?  (Take suggestions from the children/congregation. Take out of your bag items when they are suggested and if necessary, get some children up to hold the items.)

You also need people for a party. Show an invitation. Who would you invite to your party? Your best friends? the most popular kids in your class? Those who are well behaved and who are well dressed? Or those who never seem to be invited to parties?

How do you feel, when people you have invited decline the invitation and give you an excuse for not wanting to attend! Or at the last minute no one you invited shows up?

When we have a party or plan a special event, we usually only send out one invitation to each person we want to invite. In Jesus’ time, people would send out two invites. The first was to tell everyone about the event and that they were invited. The second to tell them that everything was ready and that it was time for them to come.

Jesus told a story about a man who planned an amazing party with lots of delicious food. But when the party was about to start, all the people that he had invited started to make excuses and said they could not come. The man was very upset, but he did not want his amazing party to go to waste, so he invited those people who were hungry, or living on the streets, or were differently abled, or were excluded from society al because they did not fit in.

Through this story, Jesus encourages us to live our lives differently. We should be different. We should say No! when we see people hungry, or left out, or made to feel small. We should not make excuses and forget God’s wonderful invitation to share our lives with Jesus. When that happens, then no one will be left out. No one will go hungry. God is generous and at harvest, we celebrate all the good things that God has provided. At the same time, we work for a world where no person is exploited or excluded ever again.

Next time you throw a party, or hold a celebration why not show God’s love in action by inviting those who do not usually get invited!

**Song suggestion:**

**Love in Action** by Nick and Becky Drake

<https://youtu.be/zx8Z5bEyHVE>

**A Bit more about Commitment for Life**

Commitment for Life is the global justice programme of the United Reformed Church working through our partners, Christian Aid and Global Justice Now.

Through Commitment for Life all of us here today can be faithful to God’s call to work for justice in three regions of the world: Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Today’s service focuses our attention on Zimbabwe and we’ll hear from Kevin Snyman from the Mission Team at church House who recently visited a few of our country programmes in the region.

Hymn (see suggestions)

Scripture Reading

**Luke 14:16-24 (NIV)**

**16**Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. **17**At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

**18**“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

**19**“Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

**20**“Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

**21**“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

**22**“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

**23**“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. **24**I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

Sermon Ideas

There is a story doing the rounds on Facebook: if a monkey, it goes, found a huge bunch of bananas, and then refused to share them, and instead started hoarding as many bananas as it could, the biologists would be falling over themselves to find out what was wrong with the poor, deranged creature. But if that were a human being, then the economists would be putting their picture on the cover of Forbes magazine!

It may be useful to begin by outlining the way that we see God’s economy operating in the Bible. Throughout scripture we read that God operates through abundance and free sharing, along with the warning against bulking up your bananas in bigger and better barns (alliteration intended).

Kevin Snyman is the URC Church House Programme Officer (here you could use your own experience of similar) who recently went to Zimbabwe to visit some of our partners. He reports that wherever he went in very rural areas, he was offered food. Often, he would find that a chicken was slaughtered in his honour, and he would be given the best bits to eat, like the feet and the entrails. Apparently, chicken feet are very tasty, if a little bit crunchy (with apologies to our vegetarian members).

But in many ways, these rural communities operate within God’s economy. They share what they have without asking for money. Imagine you are invited to you mum’s home for a meal, and at the end she gives you a slip of paper that says, you ow me twenty quid for the meal! If mum would not do that to us, how much less would God expect payment for all the gifts God provides!

Kevin arrived at a Christian Aid project deep in the rural parts of Mutoko and interviewed the headman who oversaw the farming project that Commitment for Life has been supporting for some time. “We have everything we need here,” he told us. “I do not need to go into the village to buy anything if I don’t want to. God provides all we need right here.”

Part of the reason why this community is so self-sufficient is because of understanding how God works in each environmental context. Christian Aid assisted them with farming techniques that suited their dry conditions. The ‘no-plough’ method sees farmers dig small holes with a stick in which they plant a seed. This small hole collects and hold water far more efficiently than ploughed fields. In addition, the underground ecology is not disturbed. The mycelium network, bugs and worms all work together to improve the health of the soil. The corn and vegetables and lemons and papayas harvested are incredibly robust and healthy and tasty and nutritious. The community was so happy to share the fruits of their bumper Zimbabwe harvest with us!

In a close by region in Mutoko, Kevin saw how indigenous plants were carefully identified, selected, harvested, and ground up into animal feed. This method of relying on naturally-growing species rather than on imported grasses and feeds, means that farming is far less destructive, and the environment is able to cope very well with the livestock.

We could learn so much from Zimbabwe here in the UK! How can we make our farming and food production more organic, more natural, and less reliant on the mechanised, fossil fuel-driven techniques? How can we de-monetise our food production so that even those without money can share in the abundance?

This is the image of love in action that Jesus offers in Luke 14. God is impatient with those who have so much already that they poo-pooh the idea of sharing in God’s feast. They have so much else going on, why should they rely on God? The irony is that if God decides even for one year to stop the rain, that even the wealthy would begin to starve. Every one of us depends for our lives on God’s economy of abundance and free gifts, even though we sometimes forget. We wonder then why we find it so easy to blame the poor for their poverty? Why do many fall so easily for scapegoating and finger pointing? Is this an unconscious way that some justify their wealth in the face of such great need?

Jesus teaches us that the hungry should be fed, that food is a gift from God, that eating together connects us to one another, to the land, and to God, and that eating is an act of caring for one another and for the earth.

This harvest, let us celebrate abundance. Let’s trust it. Let’s no longer be those who lack faith and generosity with the harvest we have gathered. We are called to share. We are called to invite those who have the least to come and share in our meal, without imposing costs and conditions. This is the vision of the coming Kingdom where money is no longer needed, where everything in God’s creation belongs to every creature equally, and we humans take only what we need for our daily bread.

Let this then be our love in action, to share God’s abundance with our neighbour in need, and work for a world where there is no such thing as poverty or wealth, only abundance to be shared for free.

Questions in Groups

1. Have you ever travelled to an African country? Please share that with two or three people around you (not family.)
2. What are some of the ways that you do or could work to address poverty in the world?

Hymn (see suggestions)

Offering

Prayers of Intercession

Final Hymn & Benediction

**Hymn Suggestions**

**Rejoice & Sing**

40 Come, you t﻿hankful people, come

41 for the beauty of the earth

42 For the fruits of all creation

124 We plough the fields and scatter

415 You shall go out with joy

474 Brother, sister, let me serve you

477 Let there be love

567 Thy hand, O God has guided

620 For the healing of the nations

**Singing the Faith**

35 The trumpets sound (the feast is ready)

102 For the beauty of the earth

123 Come, you thankful people, come

124 For the fruits of all creation

126 Praise God for harvest of orchard

130 We plough the fields and scatter

401 Come, sinners, to the gospel feast

487 You shall go out with joy

611 Brother, sister, let me serve you

615 Let love be real, in giving and receiving

663 I the Lord of sea and sky