

Church of Scotland HIV Programme

“Souper Sunday 2012”

Service theme:

“Overcoming Stigma in Christ’s Name”

This elder-led act of worship is offered as a guide for leading worship in your Souper Sunday celebrations. Please feel free to adapt it to your own local situation, or to use it in its entirety.

Preparations:

- *Recruit four elders to lead worship, plus one child for the first prayer and one adult Bible reader*
- *Bring pens, fruit, chocolate biscuits and/or sweeties, as noted in the all-age talk*
- *Consider using our children’s materials, optional images, Powerpoint presentation and song**
- *Order Gift Aid declaration envelopes* for lunch attenders*
- *Prepare a very simple soup-and-bread lunch for after the service, either in church or (as catering facilities may dictate) at members’ homes*

**These resources, along with others, may be ordered or downloaded through www.soupersunday.info*

All hymns noted here are taken from the Church Hymnary (fourth edition). Additional hymns are offered at the end of this order of service. Both readings printed here are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Order of Service

The five participants leading the service enter and sit in the chancel.

Worship leader:

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

Good morning!

Worship leader gives welcome and intimations, ending with:

Today in Church we are celebrating “Souper Sunday”. This is the third year in which the Church of Scotland has invited congregations to set aside a Sunday morning service to think about HIV in our world, and to remember in our worship and our prayers those people and communities whose lives have been affected by this virus.

This year, Souper Sunday’s theme is “Overcoming Stigma in Christ’s Name”.

At the close of our service today, all are most welcome to join us for a simple soup-and-bread lunch in our hall. At

the lunch, please feel free to make a donation towards the important work being done by the Church of Scotland HIV Programme, both here in our own country and around the world.

And now, let us take a moment of silence as we prepare to worship almighty God.

[A FEW SECONDS OF SILENCE]

*Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the king of all the earth.*

[Psalm 47: 6-7a]

Let us worship God as we sing to his praise, hymn number 59: *Oh, come, and let us to the Lord in songs our voices raise.*

[ALL SING]

Speaker A:

Please be seated.

The psalmist writes:

“In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me.

[Psalm 71: 1-2]

Let us pray:

Child Reader:

Loving God, we thank you for all your gifts, and especially for your love shown to all humankind through Jesus Christ, your Son. We thank you for your constant compassion, for your caring, guiding, protecting and forgiving. We thank you for loving all of us, despite our lack of love for you and our failure to love our neighbours.

Speaker A:

Loving God, forgive us our feeble faith, our willingness to exclude people from our circles of concern through prejudice, self-centredness or lack of understanding. Forgive us for failing to respond appropriately to the concerns of people who are marginalised in life.

Child Reader:

Loving God, as we rejoice in your love for all, and appreciate the transforming power of your pardon, we ask you to help us recognize our responsibility towards you and the world you have given us. Encourage us to respond appropriately to HIV and to learn from Jesus as we try to live and love like him.

Speaker A:

And now we join together in the words of the prayer which Jesus taught, saying:

All: *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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever.*

AMEN.

All-age talk:

You will need a bagful of goodies to hand out, such as:

- *pens (cheap from supermarkets!);*
- *oranges or apples;*
- *chocolate biscuits (fair trade of course); and*
- *sweeties.*

Have at least six of each item.

Speaker A:

Now then! I would like some volunteers. Who is happy to come forward today?

[Up to six children (or adults!) are encouraged to the front, facing the congregation]

This must be a very special day in church, because I've got some presents to give out from this bag. *[Hold up bag]*

I've got some pens here to give away, but ... I'm only giving them to people with dark hair. *[Distribute the pens, making a point of noting hair that is too light.]*

OK! Now what else do I have in my bag? How about some nice clementines. Who would like a wee orange? I'm happy to give them away, but only if you're a boy! *[Distribute the clementines, making a point of saying that girls don't qualify.]*

Now, there is still one more set of presents here: some sweeties and chocolate biscuits. This time, let's say they are only for people under this height *[signal a height that*

will rule out some of those left – it may well be that one or two children will have missed out on everything, or alternatively will have got everything. All will hopefully have reacted in some way.]

If you didn't get as much as your neighbour just now, how did that make you feel? Do you think that was very fair? *[Almost inevitably you will get the answer "No!"]*

It's not very nice to be passed over just because of the colour of your hair, or because you're a girl, or because you're above a certain height. In fact ... it's just NOT FAIR!

Can you imagine what it's like for people who are left out in the really important things of life? Can you imagine what it would be like to be told that you were living with a virus that might make you ill? Can you imagine being told that, because of that virus, you couldn't play with your friends, or go to school, or be invited to parties?

Imagine, now, what Jesus would do in that kind of situation. Do you think *He* would have rejected people in those ways? No, of course not. Jesus knew that we are all

children of God, and that God loves each one of us, no matter who we are, or how we are.

That's what's so special about Jesus: he shows us just how much God loves each and every one of us. Jesus doesn't want anyone to be left out, so let's make sure we put this right. *[Hand out gifts fairly to everyone]*

If we want to follow in the way that Jesus shows us, we need to remember not to leave out people just because they are different in some way. We need to count folk in, and not count them out.

Thank you to everyone for being such good sports, and let's give them all a big round of applause!

[Applause as people return to their seats]

Let us pray:

God, whose love encircles all the world,

We thank you that in Jesus Christ you show us how to live our lives. Help us to be open to your love, and lead us in all that we think, in all that we say, in all that we do, so that we might show other people the love that we have within us – love which comes from you and which big enough for all the world.

In Jesus' Name we pray. AMEN.

Worship leader:

And now we are going to sing a beautiful hymn which tells us that the Church of Jesus Christ is all about everyone: girls and boys, women and men worshipping God together. After this hymn, our younger members will go out for their own groups, and we'll come back together at lunchtime for some soup and bread together. But for now let us sing to God's glory hymn number 522: *The Church is wherever God's people are praising.*

[ALL SING]

Children leave

Worship leader:

In our readings from the Bible today, we are able to see that God's care and concern extend to all people: challenging each one of us to share in his great compassion for our fellow human beings.

Adult Reader:

Our first reading this morning is taken from the Old Testament and the book of the prophet Micah. We read from Micah chapter 6, verses 6 to 8.

6 "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with

burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" 8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Our New Testament reading is taken from the gospel according to St Luke at the 14th chapter, reading from verse 7 to verse 14.

7 When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. 8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9 and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. 10 But when you are invited, go

and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11 For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." 12 He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." AMEN.

Speaker B:

This passage is about faith and food. Not only are we gathering for our Sunday service, as we do each week throughout the year. Today, we will be having lunch too,

and that is something which I am sure we are all looking forward to.

For Jesus, faith and food very definitely go hand-in-hand. For him it is the most natural thing in the world to welcome everyone to a meal, no matter who they might be. He would eat with the leader of the Pharisees, and he would eat with folk who were labelled “sinners and outcasts”. Whether the high and mighty or the lowest of the low in the eyes of the world, Jesus was open to their table fellowship.

This was something that was completely scandalous in polite society, where status and honour meant a great deal, and where it really mattered how you socialised. Folk all too readily recognised “the in crowd”, and they also knew fine well who was left “out”.

But with Jesus, things were different.

Jesus told anyone who would listen that God’s Kingdom was not built on that kind of foundation. Instead of seeking an exalted place of honour, people should “go and sit in the lowest place”. And when it comes to party invitations, you might be tempted to put “your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbours” on the list. No, says, Jesus. Invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” to the banquet. Why? Because that’s how it is in God’s Kingdom, where some very different standards most certainly apply.

This message of God’s special invitation was a message that enraged the rich and powerful of the day. It was a message that cut across all that they held dear in their rigid belief system. Righteousness was supposed to be for “those and such as those” who kept the laws and who worked hard at the rituals. Acceptance was meant to be for those who were clever and religious, who toed the line and who stuck close to all the rules and regulations.

Then along comes Jesus, and blows it all away. What was this man thinking of??? Well, he was thinking of those who are so often left out and left isolated. All the way through the gospels Jesus shows a real of concern for just such people – people who are usually forgotten and forsaken by those who see themselves as important.

Earlier in our service we saw what it feels like to be left out. Have you ever felt left out? Were you, for example, the last one to be picked for a sports team at school? Maybe you have found yourself conspicuously uninvited to a party or a wedding when lots of friends got to go. Or perhaps there have been times when you have seen an “in-crowd” and felt well and truly out of it.

Whatever your experience of being left out may have been, each one is, in its own way, an example of exclusion – seeing other people who have something good or who have something special, and realising that you just don't have it yourself.

For some people, that kind of exclusion is quite simply a fact of everyday living. For people living with HIV, often the stigma is as hard to cope with as the virus itself. Loneliness, uncertainty and social isolation take a terrible toll on such people, whether young or old.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

Listen to this account of just how cruel exclusion can be, and how effectively it can be beaten. It comes from one of the Church of Scotland's overseas partner projects in the field of HIV. Although this story is from another part of the world, it has lessons for us all.

Speaker C:

When the little boy's father died, everyone was upset, but some were also a little suspicious. As the days went by following the young man's funeral, stories started circulating that the death had been the result of HIV. Before long, other parents started chattering about this death and what its implications might be. Then, the school

got involved, and a letter went out to the family to say that the dead man's child would no longer be welcome in class. The boy had lost his education.

What was to be done? The people in the local neighbourhood knew little about this virus, but what they thought they knew disturbed them a great deal.

The local church ran a community project, and the leaders of that group had an idea. They gathered everyone together and told the neighbourhood the facts about HIV. They explained that the virus is actually very difficult to pass on in the normal course of everyday living.

Classrooms and playgrounds and gym halls were safe places for children to mix, so long as parents and teachers and pupils shared their understanding and knew how to deal with some very particular situations.

And so, the church workers passed on their knowledge to the community, but they did something else as well. One of the church workers, in full view of the wider community went up to the excluded child ... and gave

him a hug. In that moment, actions spoke far louder than words. The boy's place in the school was his once more.

Stigma is a terrible thing, causing people who are already suffering to suffer much, much more. To be stigmatised by others is to be made to feel a complete outsider in your own community. And the harsh reality is that there is very little that anyone can do to improve their lot until their neighbours gain a new understanding, and then actively choose to put that new understanding into action.

And with that action, things can change for the better. Stigma does not need to have the upper hand. With strong and caring communities, lives can be turned around – old despair giving way to new hope.

Worship leader:

And now, let us all join to sing a hymn of discipleship and of challenge: *Will you come and follow me?* Hymn number 533.

[ALL SING]

Speaker C:

When you think of this man Jesus of Nazareth, what is it about him that most appeals to you? Is it that he was a brilliant teacher and story-teller? Or is it perhaps the fact that he had great healing powers which he used on many occasions?

Surely one of the most attractive – and most challenging – features of Jesus is the way in which he had time for the people that other folk ignored – the people who were side-lined or looked down upon. The gospels are full of stories of Jesus making time for those who were not considered “respectable” – women, children, publicans, lepers, the crippled, the blind, the insane; those whom the society of Jesus’ day judged as unworthy, or as guilty of sin.

Time and time again in the gospels, we hear of Jesus noticing those who are marginalised or labelled as outcasts. He cares for them, he touches them, he embraces them, letting them know that they are loved by God, and are precious in his sight. This man Jesus will not conform to the world’s standards – because God’s standards are what really count. And what goes for Jesus goes also for his Church.

St Paul tells us that the Church is like a body. He tells us that, “the body does not consist of one member but of many”. The Church of Scotland takes that idea very seriously when it comes to HIV in our world. We stand alongside our partner churches all around the world as they take on the huge challenges posed by this virus. Why? Because it is our body that is living with HIV.

And what about the individual babies and children and women and men who are living with this virus? For them, HIV and poverty are all too often linked in a terrible way. If people live in poor neighbourhoods with poor

healthcare, poor education, poor opportunity in life, then HIV is much, much more likely to take hold and spread.

So HIV should not just be seen as an issue of health. It should also be recognised as an issue of justice in our world.

And that makes HIV an issue for each one of us.

Worship leader

Stigma is something which affects many people for lots of different reasons. In such situations, do we pay little heed to what others near us are going through? Or do we reach out in understanding and in compassion to our neighbours, inviting them in and offering them a place at our table?

Let's sing a hymn now that tells of a table that is open to all in the love of God. Hymn number 685: *For everyone born, a place at the table.*

[ALL SING]

Speaker B:

Let us now bring to God our prayers for our world and its people. Let us pray:

Speaker C:

Loving Father, we pray for everyone in our world living with HIV, that they may feel loved by you and by their families and communities. Help all to receive the information, care, treatment and resources they need in order to live positively and hopefully, and to be able to play their full part in family and community life.

Speaker B:

Loving Father, we pray for people who are stigmatized, for example because of their positive diagnosis, and ask you to help all of us, and Christians everywhere, to do all we can to remove stigma and discrimination and to encourage acceptance and appropriate care.

Speaker C:

Loving Father, we pray for people living with HIV who

are unwell, remembering the millions of people for whom medication is not available. We pray for access to life-saving drugs for all who require them, and we ask your blessing upon the doctors, nurses, community workers and volunteers who play such important roles in bringing hope and well-being to so many.

Speaker B:

We remember before you our Church of Scotland HIV Programme and the work of all its partners. We pray also for the continuing work of the Church of Scotland Guild Project, “A New Hunger”. Help all of us, as individuals and as communities of faith, to be involved in showing our solidarity with those infected or affected by HIV.

Speaker C:

Loving Father, we pray for all people who are ill this day, for people who feel lonely or unloved and for people who are sad because they have recently been bereaved. We pray for people living in poverty or in situations of conflict, for refugees and for all who are struggling or in need of special support. May they know your love for

them and may we do all that we can to make our world a better place.

Speaker B:

And now in a time of silence we bring before you our own prayers of concern:

[10-15 SECONDS OF SILENCE]

Loving Father, thank you for hearing these and all our prayers, which we ask in the Name of Jesus,

AMEN.

Worship leader:

And now, we worship God in our weekly congregational offering.

Offering

Worship leader:

Let us pray:

Loving God, accept our offering which we bring to you with deep gratitude. Bless our gifts and ourselves as we seek to use our money and our skills wisely, and to love you and our neighbours,

We ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Thank you to everyone who has played their part in our Souper Sunday service this morning. And don't forget that after the benediction we will be gathering in *[INSERT LUNCH VENUE]* to enjoy a simple lunch of soup and bread together. All are welcome, especially any visitors who are here in church today. Do please stay and enjoy the tasty part of Souper Sunday!

And now we close our time of worship by singing a great hymn of thanksgiving and praise. Hymn number 182:

Now thank we all our God.

[ALL SING]

Worship leader:

Let us go now to love God and serve our neighbour; to serve God and love our neighbour.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, this day and for ever more.

AMEN.

Some alternative hymns:

192: *All my hope on God is founded*

736: *Give thanks for life, the measure of our days*

123: *God is love: let heaven adore him*

484: *Great God, your love has called here*

153: *Great is thy faithfulness*

198: *Let us build a house where love can dwell*

519: *Love divine, all loves excelling*

152: *Praise the Lord, his glories show*

124: *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

721: *We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet*

568: *When I'm feeling down and sad*

258 *When the hungry who have nothing*