

“HELP...I’m leading worship”

Second Edition

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INTRODUCTION

Worshipping together is an integral ingredient of Woman's Guild meetings. What joy it brings to our members to praise and pray as they meet in fellowship. Presidents and delegates gladly give time, through and prayers as they prepare themselves for the awesome responsibility of leading worship.

This book is designed to be of help to all those who are asked to lead worship. It comes as a supplement to *Fresh Ideas for Worship*, so beloved and so well used by countless Guild members over recent years. I know it will be warmly welcomed by our members and I commend its use in our Branches and Groups.

May God bless our worship and our witness and to him be the glory.

Mary S Sherrard
National President, WOMAN'S GUILD
February 1994

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

Help...I'm Leading Worship! has been such an inspiration for so many as they have led worship in their Guilds. In producing this second edition, we feel that we can do no better than leave most of it as it is, revise where necessary and bring resources up to date. We do indeed praise God and pray that this book will continue to play its part in enabling our members to express their faith in worship and prayer.

Elva A M Carlisle
National Convener, 2000-1

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the members of the Church of Scotland Guild. Some of those using it may be preparing to lead worship in a meeting for the first time, while others may have considerable experience in that field of service. We hope that each may find something to guide or inspire in these pages.

Warmest thanks are due to all those who have given so freely of their time, expertise and guidance in the production of this book.

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

CG	Common Ground
CH3	Church Hymnary (3 rd edn)
JP	Junior Praise
MP	Mission Praise (numbered as in individual volumes)
SGP	Songs of God's People
SOF	Songs of Fellowship
AV	Authorised Version
GNB	Good News Bible
JB	Jerusalem Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version

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Thanks are also due to the members of the Woman's Guild who submitted material for inclusion in the first edition and to all those who gave most generously of their time and effort for it and for the second edition.

The majority of Scripture quotations used throughout this publication are taken from the following sources. These are acknowledged with gratitude:

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Other versions referred to include:

The Authorised Version (various publishers); The Jerusalem Bible (London: Darton, Longman & Todd); and The New English Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

While every effort has been made to find all sources for the material used in this book, should anything have been left inadvertently unacknowledged, the Guild would appreciate details for inclusion in any future publication.

LEADING WORSHIP

WHY do we worship?

Worship is an essential part of the life of the Christian church. It gives us an opportunity to draw near to God to worship and honour him; to praise and thank him for all his goodness; to seek his forgiveness and pardon; to bring our requests and petitions to him; and to be still and know that he is God.

It is not surprising then that the acts of worship and devotion form an essential part of our meetings. It is an awesome thing for us to enter into the presence of God, and we all feel unworthy, but Jesus Christ has shown us the way, and through him we can know the peace of being in the presence of the Lord and accepted by him.

It is not a thing to fear, for we are coming to a loving God, who wants us to be with him and to spend time with him. He knows our misgivings, but is ready to help and enable us in all we seek to do for him.

Often we hear the comment, 'What right have I to lead our meeting in prayer? ... I'm not good enough'. If you are reading this book seeking help, then you are probably already in the position of being asked to lead the act of worship. Having been asked means that God is opening a door for you to draw nearer to him in faith – he is waiting to meet you and help you.

WHEN should it take place?

For our meetings to be real times of fellowship, worship must be present. Whether the act of worship comes at the beginning or end (or even in the middle) of the meeting is dependent on the format of the meeting. There is no set time.

HOW do we set about it?

There are differing types and styles of worship – you must choose the most appropriate one and the one with which you feel comfortable and happy. However, try to keep it from being the same each week – variations are a good thing. Consider the meeting itself – the theme, the speaker, those who will be present and their needs, and anything else which would influence the atmosphere of the meeting. With these thoughts in your mind, decide on the style and type of worship.

WHAT should it include?

It helps to create a sense of worship if there is a focal point – flowers, or a candle, or an open Bible on the table. If you have an epilogue, then a few moments of quiet music can help to calm the atmosphere and give a sense of God's peace.

The worship time might include reading, prayers, singing and slides – it is therefore a wise thing to involve others in this task. This also gives to other members an opportunity to grow in their faith and experience.

Don't leave your preparation to the last minute – things invariably crop up, and panic can set in!

MUSIC: for many people, music is an important part of worship, and it can allow members to use their gifts – vocal or instrumental. Don't be afraid to sing unaccompanied! Many new hymns or songs lend themselves to this. Be imaginative in your choice! Members may welcome the chance to try something new as well as the traditional favourites, and there is plenty of new material available.

PRAYERS: this time for drawing near to God is a great privilege. Speak with God in simple, ordinary, everyday language. God will lovingly accept your prayers, and your members will understand them and feel part of them. There is no special virtue in long prayers. Take time to prepare them, think through what you want them to say and pray them from your heart. Always remember that God is waiting to meet with us at any time, in any place, and he will answer our prayers. Having accepted this act of leadership as a lesson in faith, commit yourself and your task to God and he will bless you.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT!

Be adventurous in worship! Why not try some of the following ideas as part of your meeting? Be sensitive though, as with planning all worship it is important to tailor things to fit in with the rest of the evening's programme. There are many resources available to help you and you will find them in the Resources list on pages .

READING: a fresh approach to Bible-reading is to have two or more readers. They need not necessarily stand at the front; sometimes it is more effective for the 'voices' to come from the midst of the audience/congregation, or from behind (but be sure they can be heard!).

Some passages lend themselves particularly well to this approach, such as the temptations of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. This could be read by five voices: one as narrator, one as the voice of Jesus and one for each of the three temptations.

Some of the Psalms are effective when read in this way, for example Psalm 13 – three voices could be used for the three stanzas (verses 1, 2; 3, 4; 5, 6).

Remember that scripture readings can be complemented by other material, poems or meditations.

DRAMAS: this can be used to great effect. There are many good resources available on Christian themes, some giving adaptations or retelling of Bible stories. If you are going to use drama, make sure you have time to rehearse. Keep it simple – try to avoid complicated staging or elaborate props – and bear in mind how the drama is to fit in with the rest of the worship.

MIME and CLOWNING: these are increasingly used in contemporary worship. Mime could be used to illustrate a story, such as the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-collector (Luke 18:9-14). Two actors could demonstrate the contrast in attitude of the two men.

Mime can be used to highlight the message of a particular piece of music or a song, for example "Father, we adore you". Perhaps two or three people could perform these three simple movements:

- 1 "Father we adore you" – arms raised in adoration.
- 2 "Lay our lives before you" – arms out, "offering" our lives.
- 3 "How we love you" – arms crossed over chest.

Remember when you are using mime that it is particularly important that the performers can be easily seen.

In some areas of the country, there are individuals and groups who specialise in Clown ministry. Perhaps you could invite one of them to take part in your meeting.

ACTION PRAYER: if you would like to involve all of your group, here is a simple Action Prayer to try:

Lord, here are my hands! – Hold out hands in front of you.
Help me see them as you see them

When I am angry.....	-Clench fists and shake them.
make me calm	-Hands on breast. -
When I am sad....	-Bury face in hands and bow forward. –
make me joyful	-Stretch up arms and spread hands outwards.
When I am greedy..	-Make hands like grasping claws.
make me generous	-Turn hands over, palms open and up.

When I am frightened.. -Hands up to face, palms out, screening face.
give me peace -Hands in gesture of prayer.

-Windows of Prayer⁻¹

This might be a starting point for you to develop your own action prayer.

DANCE: this can be used in worship either by a small group (here it may overlap with mime: see "Father, we adore you" above) or involving everyone. A simple dance for the start of a new session or for a joint meeting is the "Great Dance". Participants form a circle and join hands. (If numbers are sufficient, form two circles, one inside the other – like a "Paul Jones". The circles will then move in opposite directions to greet each other.) To appropriate music, the circle moves round slowly, using a simple step pattern such as:

1. Step forward on right foot
Bring left foot forward beside right.
Bend knees (down, up – in time to music).
2. Step back on right foot.
Bring left foot back beside right.
Bend knees.
3. Sidestep to the right (move right foot to the right, bring left foot alongside it) three times.
Bend knees.

Repeat steps (1) to (3) as often as desired.

Once the steps have been learned (without music to begin with), explain the symbolism:

1. We step forward to greet and acknowledge each other.
2. We step back to take our place as members of the group.
3. We move round together as witness to the importance of the unity of the group as part of the body of Christ.

There is a wide range of suitable music, including "Jubilate Deo" or "You shall go out with joy" (SGP). If there is no pianist or tape available, participants could sing either of these while using the dance, and any members of your group not able to dance could still join in by contributing to the music.

VISUAL ARTS: these can be used as a backdrop for worship. A poster, picture or banner can be a focus for silent meditation. An extension of this idea is to use a series of slides as part of worship. These could tie in with the theme of the meeting. For instance, pictures of flowers, countryside, even litter, could be used as a prelude to a discussion on "caring for creation". Music (appropriate sacred or secular) can be used in the background; or the pictures could lead into prayer and meditation.

MEDITATION: Listening to a passage together in meditation – whether a Bible reading, a prayer, a poem or a story written to encourage people through an encounter with God (known as a guided meditation) – can be a very powerful way to worship together. Meditation could be called taking a breath with God, by learning to be still and trusting in the imagination. In meditation, those taking part are becoming more actively involved than is often the case when a prayer is spoken by another. They are participating as much as if the words were theirs, by allowing the words to have a special focus within them and reaching out, through their imagination, to experience them. Encourage

members to sit quietly, to consciously relax their bodies and to listen to the words slowly spoken, allowing them to sink through to a deep level within. Atmosphere is important – think about lighting the room and guarding against any possible distractions. Much material in this book can be used to form the basis of meditation.

Something different in worship will require prayerful thought and careful preparation beforehand. Clear explanations of what is planned will be needed, especially if the audience/congregation is expected to take part. But it can be a very enriching experience for all. Let us “sing a new song to the Lord”!

ABOUT PRAYER

“Yes, of course I’ll do a reading for you – just don’t ask me to say a prayer!” As Guild leaders up and down the country are well aware, when it comes to sharing worship, members will quite readily volunteer to read, or may be prepared to lead the meeting – but praying is something different.

A member of a Guild committee went to a training course, full of expectation, having more time to give to the Guild – and returned downhearted. The reason? “Someone said praying in public should be no problem – the Lord will give you the words as you speak.” The committee member believed she could never do this and so felt a failure as a committee member – and even as a Christian.

There are two sides to this question. Extempore or spontaneous prayers can be beautiful, meaningful and just right for the occasion. Equally, however, prayers written by many different people, whether famous or anonymous, can be read to great effect, as can the leader’s own prepared prayers. None of these methods is “right” or “wrong”. None is more Christian or more devout than another. They are all different, and God can use them all in his service and to his glory. There are differences in worship and different styles of prayer which vary a great deal within our churches. Some people are used to informal, spontaneous times of prayer; some are used to formal language and quite rigid orderings of content; still others would see it as the minister’s right to lead a meeting in prayer.

Out of all this, as a Guild, we have a commitment, gladly stated in our Aim, to enable members to express their faith in worship and prayer, as well as in action. So what does that mean in practice?

Do

We pray at our meetings? Do we pray at *all* our meetings? We believe in a God who is ever-present, caring and interested in all we do. Yet so often when we have a fun meeting, a social, an entertainment, we leave him out and don’t acknowledge his presence! Are we ashamed of having fun? Is such a meeting not suitable for prayer? Who gave us the capacity to have fun and enjoyment? Let’s be publicly thankful – not just to the entertainers and the tea committee!

From this, however, we realise that prayers will not always be similar in content. There are times and occasions when standard prayers will be needed – opening a meeting, dedicating an offering and closing a meeting. At other times, prayers will be adapted to the content of the meeting for the evening – praying for caring organisations, giving praise for the beauty of the world around us, asking for help in understanding our faith. Prayers can be long or short, led by a leader or another member, written out by the person praying or compiled from different sources.

For many people, the Guild has been a training ground in prayer – private and public – and it is important that we continue this tradition by encouraging and helping members to share in public worship. God will give us the words, but these words can come from many different places and at different times – not just through his Spirit as we rise to our feet – though that may well be the most natural way for some. Many of us, for public worship, need the assurance of some help, some written words to ensure that, as Paul said, we “let all things be done decently and in good order”. This is especially important when we lead others in worship and to honour God by approaching him with reverence and with dignity.

The prayers in this section are offered as an aid to worship in Guild meetings and as a guide to prayers of our own. They include prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession and petition, and you may choose to follow that structure or adapt it to suit your needs. There are also prayers for specific times or events, and well-known prayers that have enriched worship down through the centuries and in many parts of the world. The resources section offers other material. *Remember that all these resources can be adapted to suit your own situation.*

On a practical level, prayers should have a beginning, a middle and an end! That may seem to state the obvious, but sometimes the beginnings and endings can cause problems. It is important to give clear signals about these when leading worship in public. The members of the group should be told when the prayer is about to begin so that they can be ready to take part by listening. The simple words "Let us pray" are all that is required, though you may prefer another form. If there are to be pauses for silent prayers, or if the group is to be invited to join in responsively, this should be made clear before you begin.

Similarly, at the end, the prayer should be brought to a definite close. As Christians, we offer our prayers through, or in the name of, our Lord Jesus Christ, so to use a phrase such as "All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*"

These simple signals allow the audience to join meaningfully in the prayer as listeners, because they know what to expect and what is expected of them.

We all pray – when we're happy, when we are sad, when we're in trouble, for others in trouble. For the Christian, prayer should be as natural as breathing; it is our lifeline to God and the powerhouse from which we gain strength and support for ourselves and others. So, whether we find praying easy or whether we need help; whether we have been Christians for five years or fifty; whether we enjoy leading worship or whether we would rather do anything else, these prayers are offered with confident hope that God will bless their use and bless all those who make use of them in worship. We come with the same request as Jesus' disciples did so many years ago: "Lord, teach us to pray".

ADDRESSING GOD

How do we begin? How should we address God? If these questions worry you, perhaps the suggestions below may help.

When we look at the Lord's Prayer, we find that Jesus taught his followers to speak to God simply and directly, as a child talking to a parent – "Our Father in heaven". So our approach should be simple and natural, while still being reverent.

In the regular conduct of worship at meetings, we may want to focus on particular aspects of the nature of God that are appropriate on different occasions, such as "Bountiful God, Creator of all things" at the time of Harvest Thanksgiving, or "Eternal God, Ruler of all the World" at the approach to the World Day of Prayer.

It may also be useful to remember that God is revealed and worshipped as Father, son and Holy Spirit. Our prayers can sometimes concentrate on one or more of these, for example the various names of Jesus at Christmas or Easter – "Saviour", "Redeemer", "King".

A prayer can be shaped by taking a phrase such as "O Thou who art the Way, the Truth and the Life" and expanding each idea separately:

"O Thou who art the Way...
O Thou who art the Truth...
O Thou who art the Life..."

The choice of addressing God as "thou" or "you" is a personal one – but be consistent in your use of language.

The following list contains only some of the possibilities. Others can be found in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms, or in hymns. The list is for you to choose from or adapt as suits your needs, in the confidence that God is ever more ready to listen than we are to approach him.

God the Father

- Almighty and everlasting God
- Dear Father God
- Eternal Father, strong to save
- Father of peace and God of love
- God of grace and God of glory
- Judge eternal, throned in splendour
- Lord of all being, throned afar
- Lord of beauty
- Lord of grace and truth
- Loving God, who guides and cares for us like a loving parent
- Merciful God, who knows our hidden thoughts
- O God, our loving heavenly father
- O God, our refuge and our strength
- O God, the giver of all good gifts
- O God, whose Word is a light to our pathway

God the Son

- Blessed Saviour
- Divine teacher
- Eternal, living, loving Lord
- Jesus Christ, our Lord and King
- Jesus, good above all other
- Jesus, Master whose we are and whom we serve
- Lamb of God
- Lord of all hope and all joy
- Lord, our light and our salvation
- Loving Shepherd
- Saviour of the World

God the Holy Spirit

- Gracious Spirit
- Holy Spirit, truth divine
- Life-giving Spirit, Comforter
- Love divine
- Spirit of love indestructible
- Spirit of peace
- Spirit of mercy, truth and love.

PRAYERS

...Of Adoration

Almighty and ever-living God, we worship you-
Who set the stars in space-
And designed primroses for a mossy bank.
You inhabit glory unimaginable-
And yet you desire to live in our hearts.
We respond with love and praise-
You alone are worthy to be worshipped – honoured – adored.
We worship you.

* * *

As we gather for worship and fellowship,
to refresh our souls and to sit awhile at your feet,
Lord Jesus be our unity this night.
Take pleasure from all your experience of our love and faith,
Shared with each other, for your sake

* * *

Dear Loving Father,
We praise and worship you, for you are a great and loving God.
We thank you for sending us your son, Jesus Christ,
to show us that love, and to help us to see how you want us
to share that love with all around us.

* * *

Lord God, we cannot begin to understand how wonderful you are.
You have not only shown us a way of life – YOU are the way!-
the way to God, the way to one another and the way of life.
You are the giver of life – life abundant,
life in the spirit and life eternal.
How can we praise you enough?
Made in your image, loved eternally and redeemed,
we praise you for the Holy Spirit to encourage us,
strengthen us, guide and comfort us.
Like Mary, we can say:
“My soul is glad because of God my saviour,
for he has remembered me, his lowly servant”.
We worship, praise and adore you.

* * *

Lord, we praise you.
You are great and glorious.
You have shown your love,
your mercy towards us
in Jesus.
Lord we worship, we adore you.
In Jesus' name

...Of Confession

Heavenly Father, we come before you in Jesus' name, confessing that
in our actions and reactions we have failed you,
in our loving and forgiving we have fallen short of your mark,
in our believing and trusting we have denied your grace and power.
In silence we lay before you the specific sins which are clouding our relationship with you just now...
We believe if we confess our sins you will forgive us and cleanse us
Thank you for that;
so may we live as those who know we are forgiven
because of what Jesus has done for our lives.

* * *

Father, help us to confess our sin;
grant us the courage to examine ourselves candidly.
Bring to mind the thoughts, words and deeds of this day
which have caused your son to flinch with pain. (*pause*)
Make us aware of any falseness in us. (*pause*)
Help us to uncover the hidden motives which drive us,
and to recognise the distorted images we have of your love. (*pause*)

Have mercy on us; we are weak,
often misunderstanding and failing to listen to your Spirit within.
We confess all this, and our great need of your love.
Confident in your commitment to us, we gladly share our frailty with you,
our Redeemer, our Refuge and our Strength.

* * *

Almighty God, Father of us all, you are always with us and we can only ask your forgiveness for the
many times we forget this in our daily lives. We bring all our burdens to you, Lord, our faults and
hang-ups, our doubts and fears.

Lord, you know us – better than we know ourselves. You know our needs – and the greatest is you -
to know true peace of mind and soul that we are yours. Forgive us for the times we feel our faith is
weak and we're just a "dead loss"! But you are a God of mercy and you can change us.

Help us to see things with your eyes, to speak with your lips and to love with our Saviour's heart.

We depend on your mercy and trust in your love to overcome all that is evil without and within.

* * *

Forgive us that at times we don't love and care for others as we should; and help us to be more like
our Saviour.

* * *

Loving Lord, we ask forgiveness for all the shallowness of caring.
We say we care, yet we dodge the challenging issues that confront us,

as women and men, as Christians.
Our reasons and excuses come readily and sound so reasonable to us.
Forgive our closed minds, our fearfulness, our lack of spirit.
Help us to look squarely at the challenges, at the things that worry us and cause us to be fearful.
Afraid even to try lest we fail,
Afraid really to trust you.
Forgive us, Lord, for Jesus' sake.

... of Thanksgiving

Heavenly Father,
We thank you for the Guild.
We thank you for the things that link us:
For shared worship,
Fellowship in prayer,
Opportunities to read and study the Bible,
The forging of bonds and friendship,
Ways to express together
a caring loving spirit in our congregation,
our home and community,
That all can see "Whose we are and Whom we serve"!
Accept our love and thanks,
In the Saviour's name.

* * *

Almighty God,
We thank you for all we see of your own beauty in the world you have created,
and in people's lives you are re-creating day by day,
We thank you for the details of love which enrich our lives even when the going is difficult,
and we thank you most particularly for your love to us
In Jesus Christ who gives us purpose and hope today, and for the future.
Thank you, Lord.

* * *

Thank you, Lord, for our warm homes, our food, clothes and all our comforts.
Thank you for family and friends who care about us.
Thank you that..... is out of hospital now.
Thank you that each one of us really matters to you.

* * *

Our loving and Heavenly Father, you have given us everything we have and all that we need. We thank you for your word in the Bible, and we worship and adore the Christ whom we see in its pages. We thank you for your faithfulness and your long-suffering patience with us. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, but most of all, dear Father, we thank you for your greatest gift, your son who is our Saviour, guide and friend for ever – and to him be all the glory.

* * *

Thank you, Jesus, for knowing the secrets of our hearts – the hopes, the fears, the joys, the doubts. Thank you for experiencing all of these, as we do, and for embracing them and us with compassion and courage, and with the cross.

* * *

We thank you for the joy of being together and for the privilege of being involved in the work of your church.

* * *

... for Others and Ourselves

Gracious heavenly Father,
We Pray for

- those who feel they have no need of you
- those whose suffering and sorrow are too great for us to share
- those who wait and pray in patience
- those who agonise over injustice
- those who show mercy and compassion
- those whose purity and grace inspire others
- those who work for peace where no peace seems possible
- those whose witness to truth and justice has brought them suffering

Lord, teach us to pray with love and understanding;
to try to enter into the real needs that are around us:
to believe that through our prayers, you heal and bless.
Through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

* * *

Bless those of your children who have been called to serve you in far –off places and who face dangers quite unknown to us. Father, may they know that you are always with them, and grant them wisdom to know how to deal with the problems facing them.

* * *

Creator God, you made this beautiful world in which we live. As we watch the changing patterns of nature, we marvel and wonder and say “How great thou art”. Help us to be good stewards of all that you have entrusted to our care. Help us to be thoughtful in the way we use the resources of this earth, that we may set a good example to our children.

* * *

We pray for the leaders of the Sunday School and other youth organisations. We want our children to learn of your love, and we ask you to bless all those who are giving their time to our young people. Sometimes they will be disheartened, but keep us faithful in praying and supporting them in every possible way. May they have the joy of seeing the children coming to know and love you.

* * *

We ask your blessing on our members, but especially we pray for those who are sick and housebound. Grant that we may not forget them, and show us ways of sharing with them the fellowship we will enjoy tonight. Be very near to any of our number who are facing anxiety and heartache and who feel they cannot cope. Loving Father, uphold them and grant them your strength and peace.

* * *

We pray for the young families in our midst. The pressures upon them are so great. Help them to know that you care for them, and help them to know how to deal with all the demands placed upon them.

* * *

We bring to you our minister and her/his family. We thank you for them and for all they do for us. Bless them and help us to encourage them in their work for you.

* * *

O God, you are the strength of the weak, the refuge of the distressed, the comforter of the sad and the lover of our souls. In the name of Jesus, we come asking you to help all those in need....the homeless, the victims of violence both domestic and global, those scarred by the wounds that life has inflicted upon them, the lonely and depressed; our ministers, missionaries and office-bearers in the Guild....We bring them all to you in faith, trusting in your love and mercy. We pray this in the name above all names, the Lord Jesus Christ.

* * *

We thank you for all those people who work for you in the various homes and hostels run by our church. For those who seek to care for drug addicts or those addicted to drink and for whom life seems not to be worth living as it is. Bless the work and witness of your children and grant that your strength may be a reality to those who seek to kick the habits which bind them.

Save us from being judgmental, but fill our hearts with loving understanding and a desire to help as and when we can.

Encourage the staff of these caring institutions – their disappointments are so hard to bear, but help them to stay close to you that your peace may always be theirs.

* * *

Father, we remember before you the needs of others:
those who feel rejected and unloved and unwanted,
those who are terminally ill
those who are angry at the way they have been let down-who feel life is passing them by,
those who have been made redundant but who would dearly love to have a job,
those who are heartbroken because of the death of a dear loved one
- comfort them in their grief, O Lord.

* * *

Father, we pray for those who live in fear of any kind
-help them to know you are with them,
those who have to face prejudice
because of their race or colour or tongue,
those who are fearful of the future with all its uncertainties,
those who face difficult decisions where there is no easy answer.

* * *

Let us pray for those who carry great stress because of family situations,
Those setting out on a new life together,
those struggling to bring up a family without sufficient means to do so,
those concerned for children who have left home
and who don't know where they are or what is happening to them
those coping with a new home or new job or new baby,
those about to begin retirement,
those who have served your church over many years
but who now feel out of things because they can no longer be actively involved.

* * *

Heavenly Father, we pray together for a world gone wrong, disturbed and unsettled.

Forgive us our part in that; invade us with your grace that through our love and care and sacrifice you might be more fully known in our community.

We pray for those who are ill,
or worried about someone they love; *(pause to reflect)*
We pray for homes where relationships
are under real pressure; *(pause to reflect)*
We pray for those facing decisions and new challenges; *(pause to reflect)*
We pray for those who have lost heart and hope. *(pause to reflect)*

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers
and touch these situations with your grace and love,
as we pray in Jesus' name.

Offering Prayers

Heavenly Father, you have given us riches beyond measure.
We can only return a fraction of what we owe you; but we ask, Lord, that you will bless our offerings
and help us to use them wisely in your service and for your glory.

* * *

What we give, we give freely
What we have to give, we receive from your hands.

What we hold forever is your love for the world,
and for each of us.

* * *

Lord who loves a cheerful giver, accept these gifts or our heart given with joy, may they be a multiplied blessing in your service.

* * *

Lord, we don't know why we have so many of this world's benefits while others have nothing. We are filled with gratitude for the generosity you have shown to us. Accept our gifts, given in love. Bless them that they may bring hope and benefit to those in need. For the sake of Jesus.

* * *

'We give thee but thine own, whate'er the gift may be.'

* * *

Lord, so often we sing these words, yet fail to understand that all we have and all we are is due to your loving kindness towards us. We thank you, Father, for family and friends, for fellowship and fun, for every opportunity to serve you and for all that makes our lives meaningful.

* * *

We ask you to accept our offerings which are but a small token of our gratitude and love for you, Lord. Bless them and use them to further your work throughout the world.

Through Jesus Christ, we offer our prayer.

* * *

We bring these with our love, and ask that both they and we may be used for your glory.

Closing Prayer

We thank you, Lord, for being with us in this meeting, and thank you for the assurance that you will continue with each one of us as we go our separate ways.

* * *

Dear Father,

We thank you for your blessing on our meeting today. It has been good for us to leave aside the duties of the day to share this time of fellowship. Keep us aware of all that we have learned here, and help us to do what we can to show your love through the lives we live.

Be with us as we go our separate ways. You know, dear Lord, the situations and demands to which we return. Grant to each one of us your strength to enable us to cope with whatever is asked and expected of us, that in all things we may know your loving presence to uphold us.

In Jesus' name, we ask our prayer.

* * *

Lord, you have said: 'Whatever two or three are gathered together in my name – I am there'.

We praise and thank you for your presence here and for the opportunity of meeting – may our fellowship have strengthened each one of us in our faith. Help us to love you as you first loved us – and in loving you, help us to love our neighbours. May we be ready to serve you in our homes, in our community and in your church.

We ask your blessing on the people we love and the homes we return to, in Jesus' name.

* * *

Gracious heavenly Father,
Our time together has brought joy and a renewed awareness of what our fellowship in Christ means. We have been uplifted, challenged (comforted, and so on), and we thank you. We go from here strengthened in our resolve to serve you.

May we know the presence of the Holy Spirit in our day-to-day experience as we have done in our meeting tonight.

Bless our homes and families and keep us in your love always.

Through Jesus, our Lord.

* * *

Lord Jesus Christ, as we have shared in fellowship and worship here, may we go to our home situations and wider responsibilities with a renewed sense of your presence and purposes. Help us build into our lives the things we have heard about and considered today, that we will truly be a community of living faith which draws others to know you too.

* * *

Be with us in the quietness which follows company.
Speak to us as we reflect on this day closing.
Whisper our names in the silence before sleep.
Remain with us, Lord, this night and always.

Benedictions

Heavenly Father – you have created us to love you.
Lord Jesus Christ – you came to show us that love.
Holy Spirit – fill each of us with the peace and joy that comes from know that love.

* * *

Almighty God, we seek your blessing on each person here, in our hearts and in our homes, for Jesus' sake.

* * *

Adapted from the Bible:

Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.
Amen.

Jude 24-5 (AV)

May the Lord himself, who is our source of peace, give us peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with us all.

2 Thessalonians 3:16 (GNB)

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

2 Corinthians 13:13 (GNB)

May the God of peace provide us with every good thing we need in order to do his will, and may he, through Jesus Christ, do in us what pleases him. And to Christ be the glory for ever and ever!
Amen.

Hebrews 13:20-1 (GNB)

...at the Beginning of a New Session

Almighty God,
Creator of all things and giver of all life,
We acknowledge your greatness and majesty as we marvel at the works of your hand.

Thank you for all the happy times we have had since last we met
- for the times of rest and relaxation
- for the long summer days
and for the joy of being able to be out of doors.

We are glad to be together again, Lord, as we look forward to the new session.

It's good for us to be here to share the warmth of your love for each one of us.

Be with those who are with us for the first time – may we all feel welcome and wanted, and know that we are all part of this family of the Guild.

Bless those of our number who are no longer able to be with us. Let them know that through their prayers and interest they are still part of the Guild family.

Keep us ever mindful of our Aim, and grant that during the weeks ahead we may do all we can to further the work of Christ throughout the world.

These prayers we ask through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

...for the Guild

Heavenly Father, we come to you today with things on our minds, from our families, from our work. Help us to lay them down and find your perspective and space. We seek together a new way of doing things. We thank you for all that makes life rich and full of us, for the new life made possible of us in Jesus Christ.

We pray for our country: that Christian values will determine our actions and be the inspiration for our leaders. Help us to be agents of healing where there is division in relationships or in communities. We pray for people in our communities whose lives are empty. Help us to be channels of your love and compassion.

Help us to know that we are part of your great design for the world, and help us not to lose sight of the fact that each day you have some special task for us to do, which helps bring nearer God's kingdom here on earth.

We pray for your blessing on the Guild. Show us what road we are meant to take so that your message comes alive for so many more people. We thank you for those who have gone before us, for the heritage of the Guild and for the obedience and service of so many lives. Help us to be your disciples for our day and age. We rejoice to be part of your plan for the world, and ask you to make us fit instruments for the carrying-out of your will.

You are the light of the world; make us shine with Christ's love in our lives, and let a light shine forth from our fellowship. Help us to take the quiet moments with you and let your peace run through our lives.

We commit our lives to your service, for Jesus' sake.

Some Favourite Prayers

Each thing I have received, from thee it came,
Each thing for which I hope, from thy love it will come,
Each thing I enjoy, it is of thy bounty,
Each thing I ask, comes of thy disposing.

(Author unknown)

* * *

I weave a silence to my lips...
my mind...
my heart...

Calm me, O Lord, as you stilled the storm.
Still me, O Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

(David Adam ²)

* * *

O God,
as truly as you are our Father, so just as truly you are our Mother.
We thank you, God our Father, for your strength and goodness.
We thank you, God our Mother, for the closeness of your caring.
O God, we thank you for the great love you have for each one of us.

(Mother Julian of Norwich (fourteenth century) ³)

* * *

Take, Lord,
and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding
and my entire will,
all that I have and possess.

You have given all to me; to you, Lord, I return it.

All is yours; do with it what you will.

Give me only your love and your grace; that is enough for me.

(St Ignatius Loyola ⁴)

* * *

Prayers for Peace

Lead me from
Death to life,
From falsehood to truth.

Lead me from
Despair to hope,
From fear to trust.

Lead me from
hate to love,
From war to peace.

Let peace fill
Our heart,

Our world,
Our universe.

* * *

The Guild Prayer

(available as pocket-sized card from Guild office)

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me right where I am.
Help me to know your love deep in my heart, and enable that love to flow from me to those with whom I am in contact.
Amen.

Remember to pray regularly for the Guild. Many members make a special commitment to pray at the thirteenth hour of the thirteenth day of every month.

Be Still

Time for myself... Why is it that I find it so hard to take time for myself? Time to be, rather than to do. Time to think, to talk to God, and most of all to be silent in his presence while he talks to me.

You know how it is Lord! There is always so much to be fitted in. People to be seen ... work to be done ... obligations to fulfil. It is so difficult to distinguish between the urgent and the important. Often, what is urgent elbows its way to the forefront of my day, and the important gets trampled on in the rush.

Slow me down, Lord. Teach me the art of creating islands of stillness, in which I can absorb the beauty of everyday things: clouds, trees, a snatch of music. Prompt me to lift up my heart to you in a moment of thankfulness. Impress upon my mind that there is more to life than packing every moment with activity, and help me to fence in some part of my day with quietness. And please talk to me and help me to listen, so that I take your peace rather than my confusion back with me into the hurly-burly of a hurting world.

(Marion Stroud, *The Gift of Friends* (Lion Publishing))

* * *

Take me, Lord, from busyness to the place of quietness,
From the tumult without cease, into your great unending peace,
Help me then, my Lord, to see what I am and ought to be.

(David Adam ⁵)

* * *

Tourist's Prayer

O Lord, I don't want to be a spectator,
A tour passenger looking out upon the real world,
An audience to poverty and want and homelessness.
Lord, involve me – call me,
And Lord – help me to step off the bus.

(Freda Rajotte ⁶)

* * *

Lord God, you created all equal,
All in your image and likeness.
Help us to work to remove the injustices
Which lead to some being more equal than others.
May our hands be your hands,
To bring relief to the poor, the hungry, the needy.
May our ears be your ears,
To hear the groans of the oppressed.
May our healing be your healing.
To give food to the hungry, hope in despair.
To bring freedom to captives and all those enslaved.
May we, in partnership with all creation, work together
To bring about God's Kingdom of Justice and Peace.

(SCIAF ⁷)

* * *

An Open Invitation

Lord, you invite us – not some of us, all of us: not the good and righteous, all of us – unconditionally.

Lord, we come – meeting you, meeting each other, accepting each other, unconditionally.

Lord, we go – constant in prayer, and prayerful action, expressing your continuous invitation – loving, sharing, seeking, bringing, serving the world you love.

(International Executive Committee, World Day of Prayer)

... from around the World

Russia

Too long have I worried about so many things;

And yet, my Lord, so few are needed!

May I, today, live more simply

- like the bread:

May I, today, see more clearly

- like the water:

May I, today, be more selfless

- like the Christ.

The Philippines

Lord, in these times

when we feel we are losing hope,

or feel our efforts are futile,

let us see in our hearts and minds

the image of your resurrection,

and let that be our source of courage and strength.

With that, and in your company,

help us to face challenges and struggles

against all that is born of injustice.

New Zealand

O God, we pray that we may do your will:

This year, as it stretches before us with all our hopes and fears, plans and projects. Help us to plan aright, and to accept your guidance when it is shown to us, even if it means changing our preconceived ideas.

This month, as we seek to put into action some of these plans, that we may get our priorities right.

This week, if duties and pleasures rush at us clamouring for attention, or even if nothing happens that seems worthwhile.

This day, when the pressures of life can so often overwhelm us and make us forget where we are going.

This hour, when we have to act, and having acted cannot then undo what we have said and done.

This minute, as we come before you and pray to you.

May we do your will, now and always, O Lord our God.

Chile

Empower me. Lord,
to take the risks of faith today
for your sake and the gospel.

South Africa

Father and Friend,
help us to learn
that goodness is stronger than evil;
that love is stronger than hate;
that light is stronger than darkness;
that life is stronger than death;
and that every victory is ours
through your forgiving love.

(Bishop Desmond Tutu)

More prayers from around the world can be found in material produced by Christian Aid (see Resources section)

Paraphrase and Prayer Based on 1 Corinthians 13

I may be able to communicate well and express sublime and heavenly truths, but if I have no deep concern in my heart, I shall provoke no better response than if I blew on a trumpet or banged on a gong.

I may be clever enough to know all there is to know, and even be able to tell accurately what is going to happen in the future. I may have such complete faith in God that nothing is impossible to me, but unless I love God above all else, I shall amount to nothing.

If I were to give everything I have to feed the hungry, and were even to sacrifice my life for others, unless I truly cared for these people, I should achieve precisely nothing.

LOVE is like this:

It is very patient.

It tries to build people up.

It is always kind to them, in thought, speech and action.

Love is never jealous of others.

It doesn't keep trying to impress upon other people how important it is.

Love is never rude.

It displays good manners at all times and never puts itself first.

Love does not become irritable or touchy, nor does it grow resentful.

Love doesn't keep dwelling on the faults of others, or pride itself on its own goodness by comparison.

It doesn't rub its hands and chuckle with glee when others go wrong.

On the contrary, it is delighted and full of thankfulness, along with all good people, when goodness, justice and truth come out on top.

LOVE has superhuman endurance.

It goes right on believing in the best, never losing its hope that God will have his way with the world.

LOVE cannot be beaten, it never dies, it will not fail.

Let us pray:

Father,

we thank you that by so many means
you show your love for us.

You give us the world in which we live,
you make us part of a family and members of a community
in which we find our friends.

You show yourself to us in Jesus,
whose love for us took him to the cross.

We thank you that we learn from you
that love is the key to life.

Without it, all our activity is worthless.

With love, even that which looks like failure and defeat
can be used to create something new
or build up something old.

Forgive us

for being so unlike Jesus,
for losing patience with each other,
for trying to break each other down with our criticisms
and lack of understanding.

Forgive us

for trying to impress others with our own ideas of ourselves,
for using others to raise our own self-respect,
for blaming them when our relationships are unsatisfactory.

Forgive us
for our unkindness towards each other,
especially for what we sometimes say about people
behind their backs.

Forgive us
for our jealousy of one another
and for the spitefulness that sometimes goes with it.

Forgive us
for being quick to take offence
and for becoming resentful when others get the praise
and our work goes unnoticed and unrewarded.

Forgive us
when we take pleasure in other people's faults or mistakes,
and when we brood over wrongs done to us
so that they sour all our relationships.

Help us to forgive others
so that we may receive your forgiveness.

Lord, we thank you that your love for us is our salvation.
Where should we be without your love? Only love like yours can bend down and rescue us. Only
love like yours can forgive us and make us whole.

Thank you for your saving work in us
through the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

An Outline Prayer

A particularly simple yet effective outline for prayer can be devised by using the outline of "Kum ba yah" ... 'Come by here'.

Use the opening line of each verse, not necessarily in the printed order, for that can depend on the meeting, and the content can be varied to cover many items of concern. The appropriate verse of 'Kum ba yah' could be sung in between each section of the prayer, if desired.

Let us pray:

Kum ba yah, Lord ... come by me ... and let us know your presence in our hearts, in our thoughts,
tonight.

As we listen to your word, sing your praise and bring our prayers to you, make us aware of your Holy Spirit within us, leading us and guiding us to a deeper faith.

Come by here, Lord.

Someone's crying, Lord ...

We remember before you those who are ill ... comfort and uphold them in the warmth of your love. Give them courage in their pain, and hope of relief from their discomfort.

Grant strength and patience to those who bear the responsibility of caring for the sick, in body or mind.

We pray for those who are anxious for loved ones. Support them in their concern, and lead them to an awareness of your sustaining love.

Come by here, Lord.

We pray for those whose lives are disrupted by war or natural disaster ... for the starving, the refugee, the homeless. May leaders of war-torn countries learn tolerance and understanding, that peace may ensue. Let reason prevail, that all may love their neighbour, however different. Preserve the safety of those whose aid is a lifeline to the victims.

Come by here, Lord.

Someone's praying, Lord ... and we would pray for those who use their skills to further your work. For our speaker this evening ... we ask a special blessing.

We pray for our leadership team and all our members. We pray for the work, local and national attempted in your name, by our movement.

Come by here, Lord.

Someone's singing, Lord ... and we praise you for all your goodness to us. We recognise you in the green buds and in the bright flowers peeping through the soil, and in the fine spring days, all reassuring us of your promise of new life. We pray that we will be careful custodians of your great creation, that our children will inherit an unpolluted earth, and also know your benefits. Most of all, Lord we praise you for that greatest gift ... your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who did indeed 'Come by here', teaching us to pray together saying –

Out Father, who art in heaven ...

ANOTHER WAY TO PRAY

Contemplation of the Gospels

Increasingly, an interest is being shown in a very ancient method of prayer: imaginative contemplation of the Gospels.

What is it, and could it be fruitful for our members?

Contemplation (or meditation, as it is sometimes called) seeks to use the memory and imagination to flesh out a story from the Gospel. We all have a storehouse of memories: experiences, feelings, moods, sights, sounds, smells and so on. We know that a smell can evoke a memory which we relive in our imaginations and enjoy again. A song may recall a painful memory, and we actually feel the pain of the situation again.

Psychology confirms the value and power of our memory and imagination for the health of a whole person. Contemplation of the Gospels accepts both as gifts of God for our spiritual health. When we contemplate, we imagine the scene – for example, the two disciples walking to Emmaus – and with the help of our own memories of walks we have taken (smells, noises, sights and feelings) we enter into the picture with the characters, perhaps even taking the part of one of them in our imagination.

What is the object of contemplation?

Christians believe that the Word of God is alive and active. By the use of our imagination, we all use Scripture to speak to us in a personal way, through our own experienced sensations and feelings. When a person says ‘*That Bible reading just spoke to me today*’, it probably did so because a chord was struck in the listener’s memory. Much comfort can be found through contemplation. Also, since God always seeks to draw us closer to him, contemplation can disturb us, as we discover new aspects of his call on our lives.

Are there any dangers?

Only that your members will not enjoy this method of prayer. God loves variety, and contemplation is simply one of many ways to enter his presence and listen for his voice.

There is no hypnotism whatsoever involved, and each member can choose to stay with the imagined scene for as long as she or he is comfortable. Some may be so comfortable that there is a danger they will drop off to sleep!

To find out more about this method, read:

- Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*
- Huggett, *Listening to God*
- Hughes, *God of Surprises*
- Hughes, *Oh God, Why?*

What do we need, to begin?

Set aside a space of fifteen minutes in the worship programme. Start with a short relaxation exercise encouraging people to relax their bodies and to clear their minds of the thoughts of the day. Appoint a person who is willing to lead by reading the passage slowly and clearly, and then by inviting the members to picture the scene and to become aware of the people, the scenery or setting, the noises, the colours and so on. This person has to give the members time to relax into their imagination, but can also offer help by occasionally and quietly asking a question. For example:

‘Are you present in the scene?’ – ‘Who are you?’

‘What can you hear?’ ‘What feelings are you aware of?’

‘What do you want to tell Jesus?’

‘What does Jesus say to you?’

The question must be open enough to be helpful to everyone, and may differ according to the passage being used.

An introductory exercise which uses the memory and imagination in a way with which we are all familiar may be a useful starting point. Try the one below. A relaxation exercise, as described above,

or a piece of music can help people to still themselves in preparation; this need not be long and could lead straight into the contemplation. The chosen leader may wish to tape the reading and the guiding questions, leaving spaces of two minutes or so between each one, and simply play the tape at the meeting. As confidence grows, the 'live' delivery will be preferred, as this allows for the Spirit to suggest quietly a good guiding question. A couple of friends might volunteer to listen and 'do' the contemplation.

Introductory Exercise in Contemplation

I invite you to recall to mind a happy memory – a place, a time, and event which was for you one of great joy. I will ask you to replay the memory as though you are watching a video. Don't worry if you find yourself becoming distracted. Simply go through the relaxation exercise again (if appropriate) and replace that distraction with the memory you have recalled.

Now, if you can, bring a happy memory to mind and enjoy the scene in your imaginations.

(pause)

What can you see?
What can you hear?
What can you smell?

(pause)

Are you aware of colours, music, voices, faces?
Enjoy this scene from your life for a little while.

(pause)

Now I would like you to leave the scene for a moment and become aware of *this* moment in time, this room, keeping your eyes closed.

What sounds are you aware of inside the room? And outside?

What are you feeling? Are you aware of any feelings of peace, joy or excitement spilling over from your special memory into this moment?

Go back once more to that special memory and savour the experience

(pause)

This memory holds much encouragement and strength for you. Hear the words spoken to you or experience again the sensations which make this memory a happy one. Enjoy the people here, or the colours, the smells, the scenery. Enjoy the positive way you feel about yourself.

(pause)

Now return again to this moment in time, but try to bring with you some of those positive feelings. Be aware of this room, the noises, smells, the chair upon which you sit. What feelings are you aware of in yourself?

Perhaps you can express gratitude for the enjoyment of your memory, giving thanks for the people and the places that have brought happiness in the past and can still be a source of strength and joy in your life.

As you do this, enjoy a piece of music and allow the good feelings to soar in your heart.

Music Suggestions

Gloria – The Sacred Music of John Rutter (Collegium Records)

The music of dolphins

Contemplations of a Gospel Passage

John 20:19-21

A simple exercise as before would be helpful

I am going to read a short passage from the Gospel. I read it through twice. Try to picture the scene described, laying aside any intellectual questions about the passage for the moment.

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you' and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father send me, so I am sending you.' Jerusalem Bible

Read the passage slowly again, then after a pause, say:

Try to imagine the scene, but do not worry if you become distracted. Simply replace the distracting thought with the phrase 'Peace be with you', saying it over as you breathe out.

(pause)

As you imagine the scene, can you see the room, see expressions on faces, hear voices?

Perhaps you could imagine yourself present in the room talking with the men and women.

(pause)

Christ appears. Feel the reaction of the group. What are you feeling?

Hear Christ speak to you.

What does this peace mean for you?

Stay with this scene for a few minutes and ask God to speak to you through it.

(pause of a few minutes)

We are going to leave this scene now. Listen to the music and let Christ's peace fill you.

Play some gentle music. After a time of quiet, people may want to share their experience. Some may not have been comfortable and need to express this. Others may wish not to share. Be sensitive to needs.

The best way to discover is to do, and it is of course possible, even preferable, to discover imaginative contemplation in private and personal devotions before attempting to lead a group into it.

Other suitable Gospel passages include:

Mark 2: 1-12	Healing of the paralysed man
Mark 4: 35-41	Jesus calms the storm
Mark 10: 13-16	Jesus blesses the children
Luke 9: 10-17	Feeding of the 5000
John 12: 1-8	Mary anoints Jesus

Meditation on Violence

(This mediation might be particularly suitable for the end of a meeting – for example, when the subject has been the work of Amnesty International or Women’s Aid)

Be still and know God:

Be still and know that he will heal you:

Be still and put your trust in the Lord.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

Violence has many shades. Everyone has been the victim of violence in one form or another, and we are all guilty of violence in word or thought, if not in deed.

Take some time to read Matthew 27: 15-26. As you read, imagine that you are one of the disciples or one of the crowd. Did you shout for Barabbas? Did you deny Jesus? How do you feel?

Violence is often dressed up in religious clothes, as in Northern Ireland today or in Egypt 3000 years ago. Each side tells us that they are justified in killing; what we must remember is that God doesn’t take sides. God loved the Egyptians and Israelites alike, and made no distinction between Jew and Greek. God doesn’t have favourites; so why, then, does he allow violence? Why is violence all around us – in war, in street crime and in our own homes where there should be love and trust and security? The answer is that God does not allow these things. He does, however, allow us the privilege of freedom and choice. If we stray too far from him, then we are responsible for making the wrong choices.

If we are hurting, God is there for us; all we have to do is ask. Ask for comfort, for help, for strength, especially the strength and the grace to forgive. Ask also that God be with the afflicter, where help is vital.

Now read Matthew 5: 38-48

Along with our feelings of betrayal, hurt, rejection and bitterness must come forgiveness. For without love and forgiveness, we will not heal and cannot be whole again.

Be aware of those around you, be sensitive to their situation. God will enable you to hold out your arms for them and enfold them in the shelter of your love.

Prayer:

Loving Lord God,

Be our shelter and our strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. Help us to face the storms of life, for they will often catch us unawares when our defences are down and our spirit is at a low ebb.

Lord, we ask that you enable us not to judge or apportion blame. Give us the grace, Lord, to turn the other cheek. Heavenly Father, as you help us in all our troubles, we shall endeavour to hold out our arms to others in need, giving them the help we receive from you. As we sail the ocean of storms, Father, be Lord of our rocking boat. Amen.

Any of the following may be used in conjunction with the meditation is used in a group setting:

Hymns

SGP	19	Christ be beside me
SGP	48	I need thee every hour
CH3	669	Put thou thy trust in God
CH3	115	Come down O Love Divine
CG	12	Be still for the presence of the Lord
CG	1	A Touching Place (Christ's is the world in which we move)
MP	16	Be still and know that I am God

THE PSALMS

The Prayer Book of Jesus

Few of us will have escaped a time in our lives when our private prayer life has fallen to pieces. During such difficult times, using the Psalms as a baseline for private prayer can give a stability to daily prayer not otherwise experienced.

Why is it that the Psalms prove so helpful? There are three main reasons for this.

First, *the Psalms were the very bedrock of the family and personal prayers of the Hebrew people and therefore, of Jesus himself.* They were basic to the liturgy of his people and Jesus, like so many others, would have prayed them so often that he knew them by heart. We find good evidence for this in the Bible. When Jesus was cornered and could scarcely, under the pain of the cross, find words with which to pray, he was able to summon and prayer from the Psalms to express his deepest anguish: 'My God, why....?' (Psalm 22). It seems that Jesus handled the pain of the crucifixion by praying. According to Luke, Jesus died praying. His very last words before his death were a prayer which he had learned, night after night, at his mother's knee: 'Into your hands I commit my spirit' (Psalm 31)

The Psalter was clearly Jesus' prayer book. He had, one might say, interiorised the Psalms – made them part of his very being – and could, when scarcely able to articulate a prayer of his own, draw from the Psalms to offer to his Father his deepest feeling of anguish and commitment.

This is why the Psalms have been found by so many to be such a source of strength and comfort. As we pray for them, we take into our minds and hearts, the very prayers which Jesus prayed. Some believe, in fact, that in entering into them, we may enter now into his life of prayer to his father.

The second reason why the Psalms have been found to be so helpful is a personal one and relates to how we ourselves may be feeling as we set aside time to pray.

Sometimes we may be so tired that we cannot find words to pray. We cannot bring them to a rational focus or articulate them, and here in the Psalms they are given to us – as graciously given as everything else that God gives to us.

Words of praise are given and words of sorrow

Most of us come to our prayers, whenever, with conflicting moods. We might get up feeling full of joy in God, and can readily drop into a Psalm of praise. But then there follows and Psalm of sorrow, in which we are invited into a low time with the Psalmist, and to feel with him his anguish. Our own spirits cannot be allowed to forget that there are others in this world, the sick, the hungry, those without work, who are not feeling the joy which we feel that day. If we are to live our lives with any kind of sensitivity, we must be helped to feel with them. This the Psalms of sorrow can do for us. We might, however, simply be feeling low, apprehensive about the tasks before us. We find in the Psalmist one with a fellow-feeling. Be the entrenched Psalm of praise can – and does – raise our hearts. So, God by his grace evens our spirits for living our lives with serenity.

The third reason why the Psalms are so helpful is that *the theme of the Psalms seems to embrace the whole of life*. Anyone praying the Psalms can make their own selection out of the wide expanse of life which the Psalms cover. The Psalmist gives thanks for the beauty of the natural order – ‘The heavens declare the glory of God...’ (Psalm 19). He prays about daily work and about the harvest – ‘The soil has given its harvest. God has blessed us!’ (Psalm 67) Psalms were written for the occasion of marriage (Psalm 45) and celebrated the delightful shrieks of children (Psalm 8). They were also written for the downside of life when the Psalmist was suffering from such anguish from disease and pain and such feeling of guilt that he felt his life was nearing its end (Psalm 38). At least one Psalm was written by a deportee out of the bitterness of ethnic cleansing and captivity. The Psalms have profound integrity because they deal with the gut issues of daily life.

There are many ways by which one may pray the Psalms. It is possible, for example, to pray the Psalms through from 1 to 150 following a twice yearly cycle. This simple pattern of prayer was devised by Annie Small, one of the founding mothers at St Colm’s College, who was a person of profound spirituality, who delighted in the Psalms (and indeed wrote a very beautiful book on them) and who tried to find practical ways to help missionaries in training with their devotional lives. Her Psalm cycle is included in a small booklet entitled *Traditions Which Endure*. Again we may seek to deepen our understanding of the Psalms as we pray them, by reading them with a commentary of some depth. Others will find yet other ways of their own to pray the Psalms.

The praying of the Psalms is an act of commitment to the renewal of the church. It is a simple fact that, whenever in the history of the church there has been dynamic growth, this has been accompanied by the rediscovery of the central importance of the Psalms as a medium by which we may worship God. The early church sang ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.’ At the time of the Gregorian revival (AD 600) and in the monastic movement, the chanting of the Psalms in praise of God was the bedrock of liturgical prayer. At the time of the Reformation, Christians in Scotland uncovered the Psalms in their own language for their own heartfelt praise of God, and metricised them to enable them to be learned and sung by illiterate people. In our own day, new translations of the Psalms with new modes of singing are unlocking them afresh for us. To pray the Psalms is to stand entirely in a tradition of prayer to God in which we enter deeply into the prayer of Jesus and his people and allow our own lives to be deepened and brightened for the praise of God and the service of his kingdom.

Praying through the Psalms

Father, you know us as we are, our faults and failures as well as our successes.

Lord you have examined me and you know me
You know everything I do:
From far away you understand all my thoughts.
You see me, whether I am working or resting;
You know all my actions.
Even before I speak, you already know what I will say.
You are all round me on every side;
You protect me with your power.
Your knowledge of me is too deep;
It is beyond my understanding.
Examine me, O God, and know my mind.
test me and discover my thought.
Find out if there is an evil in me
and guide me in the everlasting way. Psalm 139 (GNB)

Adoration and praise are often far from our thoughts as we rush through our daily life.

I thank you Lord, with all my heart;
I sing praise to you before the gods.
I face your holy Temple, bow down and praise your name
because of you constant love and faithfulness,
because you have shown that your name
and your commands are supreme.
You answered me when I called to you;
with your strength you strengthened me
You will do everything you have promised;
Lord you love is eternal.
Complete the work that you have begun. Psalm 138 (GNB)

Inspire us to greater heights of hope and depths of belief.

You have done many things for us, Oh Lord our God;
there is no one like you!
You have made wonderful plans for us.
I could never speak of them all – their number is so great!
May all who come to you be glad and joyful.
May all who are thankful for your salvation
always say 'How great is the Lord'. Psalm 40 (GNB)

Life is often hard; the decisions and compromises we make can leave us unhappy with the choices we have made.

Be good to me, your servant,
so that I may live and obey your teachings.
Open my eyes,
so that I may see the wonderful truths in your law.

I am here on earth for just a little while;
do not hide your commands from me,
My heart aches with longing;
I want to know your judgements at all times.
Your instructions give me pleasure;
they are my advisors

Psalm 119 (GNB)

Uphold us when we are troubled, when we are sinking in deep mud and there is no solid ground,
when we are worn out calling for help.

Answer me, Lord, in the goodness of your constant love;
in your compassion, turn to me!
Don't hide yourself from your servant;
I am in great trouble, answer me now!
Come to me and save me.

Psalm 69 (GNB)

Renew in us a calmness of spirit, that we may hear your still small voice about the noise of our
confusion.

The Lord Almighty is with us.
Come and see what the Lord has done.
See what amazing things he has done on earth.
He stops wars all over the world;
He breaks bows, destroys spears and sets shields on fire.
'Stop fighting' he says 'and know that I am God,
supreme among all the nations, supreme over the world.'

Psalm 46 (GNB)

Everything we do, we would do to glorify your name, but how often we fall short of that goal.

To you alone, O Lord, and not to us, must glory be given
because of your constant love and faithfulness.

Psalm 115 (GNB)

Hear our prayer, O Lord, and let our cry come unto you.

Songs from the Psalms

The index of Common Ground lists, under the heading 'Psalm Settings', some of those modern songs
which are based on the psalms, For example:

CG	10	As the deer (Psalm 42)
CG	18	Come all your people (Psalm 100)
CG	94	O Lord hear me prayer (Psalm 4)

The music edition of Mission Praise is also helpful in this regard.

ABOUT BIBLE READINGS

Remember, it can be refreshing to try a different translation or paraphrase of the Bible, such as *The Message* by Eugene H Peterson or *A Glasgow Bible* by Jamie Stuart.

A Guide to Appropriate Passages

From the Old Testament

A sign of hope	Genesis	9: 8-17
Abraham obeys God	Genesis	12: 1-9
The Ten Commandments	Exodus	20: 1-20
Where you go, I will go	Ruth	1: 1-22
Hannah's prayer	1 Samuel	1: 9-20
Elijah and the Widow	1 Kings	17: 8-24
A virtuous wife	Proverbs	31: 10-31
Confidence in God	Isaiah	40: 21-31
Rivers in the desert	Isaiah	43: 1-21
The promise of good things	Jeremiah	29: 10-14
A new covenant	Jeremiah	31: 31-34
Covenant of peace	Ezekiel	43: 25-31
Dry bones	Ezekiel	37: 1-10
Repentance and restoration	Hosea	14: 1-9
An age of peace	Micah	4: 1-7

From the Psalms

The heavens declare God's glory	19
The earth is the Lord's	24: 1-6
Trust in the Lord	37: 1-9
Prayer for forgiveness	51: 1-12
God blesses us	67
Trust in God	91: 1-6
A new song	96
The Lord is God	100
Prayer for God's help	118: 1-6
Looking to the Lord	123
Out of the depths	130
O Lord, my heart is not proud	131
Confidence	138
Search me, O Lord	139: 1-18, 23-24
Universal praise	150

From the New Testament

Mary's Song of Praise	Luke	1: 46-55
Zechariah's Prophecy	Luke	1: 67-79
Song of Simeon	Luke	2: 25-35

Events in the life of Jesus

Baptism	Matthew	3: 13-17
Calling the disciples	Matthew	4: 18-22
Sending out the disciples	Mark	6: 7-13
Peter's declaration	Mark	8: 27-30
Transfiguration	Mark	9: 2-9
Entry into Jerusalem	Mark	11: 1-11
Anointment at Bethany	Mark	14: 3-9
Last Supper	Matthew	26: 26-30
Crucifixion	Luke	23: 26-49
Resurrection	Mark	16: 1-7
Walk to Emmaus	Luke	24: 13-35

Miracles

Calming the storm	Luke	8: 22-25
Feeding the 5000	Mark	6: 35-44
Healing the lepers	Luke	17: 11-19
Healing of the paralysed man	Mark	2: 1-12
Healing of Simon's mother	Mark	1: 29-34
Healing of the woman who touched his cloak	Luke	8: 43-48
Walking on water	John	6: 15-21

Teachings of Jesus

Ask, seek, knock	Matthew	7: 7-12
Beatitudes	Matthew	5: 1-12
Blessing the children	Mark	10: 13-16
Do not worry	Matthew	6: 25-34
Feed my sheep	John	21: 15-19
Greatest Commandment	Mark	12: 28-34
I am the way, the truth and the life	John	14: 1-7
Judgement of the sheep and the goats	Matthew	25: 31-46
Life-giving water	John	4: 5-14
Love your enemies	Luke	6: 27-36
Parable of the Good Samaritan	Luke	10:29-37
Parable of the Prodigal Son	Luke	15: 11-24
Parable of the sower	Matthew	13: 39, 18-23
Prayer	Matthew	6: 5-15

The Early Church

Coming of the Holy Spirit	Acts	2: 1-4
Conversion of Saul	Acts	9: 1-9
Grace and faith	Romans	5: 1-11
If God is for us	Romans	8: 31-39
One Body	1 Corinthians	12: 12-27
Love	1 Corinthians	13
Armour of God	Ephesians	6: 10-18
Faith and actions	James	2: 14-24
God is light	1 John	1: 5-9

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE BIBLE

For our personal preparation before leading meetings:

The right attitude	Psalm 19: 7-14 Ephesians 5: 1-2, 15-17
Seeking forgiveness	Psalm 51: 1-2, 6-15 Luke 24: 45-47
The promise of God's help	Joshua 1: 1, 5-9 Matthew 28: 19-20
Thanksgiving	Psalm 103: 1-14 1 Thessalonians 5: 14-16

Passages particularly suitable for reading as part of worship:

Who God is	Isaiah 40: 21-31, John 1: 1-5
God's promise to send the Messiah	Isaiah 42: 1-7, Luke 1: 26-38
The future of the nation	2 Chronicles 7: 12-20 Luke 22: 24-30
Coming to God	Psalm 100, Psalm 130
Walking with God	Isaiah 35
Security in God	Psalm 23, Psalm 121 John 10: 7-10, Romans 8: 31-39

Themes with related readings and hymns

Be prepared	Matthew 25: 1-13	CH3 319	Ye servants of the Lord
Building the Church	1 Peter 2: 4-10	CH3 339 MP 50	O Breath of Life For I'm building a people of power
	Colossians 5: 8-15	CG21	Christ be our light
Caring	Leviticus 25: 35-43	MP 157	May the mind of Christ
	Galatians 6: 1-10	CH3 450	Saviour, teach me
	Psalm 150	CG11 CG 108	Sing for God's glory Sing of the Lord's goodness
Celebration	Psalm 96: 7-13	CH3 296	Rejoice the Lord is king
	Luke 15: 8-10	SGP 59	Jubilate, everybody
Choices	Deut 30: 15-20	CH3 663	O for a closer walk with God
	Matthew 6: 24	SGP 48	I need thee every hour
	Luke 10: 38-42	SGP 93	Seek ye first
	Mark 1: 16-20	CG 148	Will you come
	Mark 3; 1-6	CG 67	Jesus Christ is waiting
Christmas	Isaiah 9:2, 6, 7	CH3 172	O little town of Bethlehem
	Micah 5: 2	CH3 173	The first Nowell
	Matthew 1: 18-25 2: 1-12	CH3 180	Child in a manger

	Luke 2: 1-20	CH3 194	Love came down
Conservation	Genesis 1: 26-31 1 Timothy 6: 17-19	CH3 451 SGP 70 CG97	Almighty Father Lord bring the day to pass Oh the life of the world
Creator God	Genesis 1: 1-12 John 1: 1-15 Acts 17: 24-28 Psalm 19	SGP78 SGP 86 CH3 120 CG34 CG53	Morning has broken O Lord my God Lord of Beauty For the fruits How great thou art
Differing Gifts	1 Cor. 12: 12-31 1 Cor. 12: 4-11	CH3 455 SGP 65 CG102	Angel voices Let us talents Praise God for the harvest
Faith	Matthew 8: 5-13 Matthew 17: 14-21 Hebrews 10: 22-25 Hebrews 12: 1-2 James 2:14-26 Romans 3: 21-30	CH3 81 CH3 664 SGP 107 SGP 69 CH3 669 CG 145	My faith looks up to thee O for a faith Through the love of God Look forward in faith Put thou they trust in God When our confidence is shaken
Forgiveness	Matthew 18: 21-35 Ephesians 4: 29-32 Colossians 3: 12-17 1 John 1: 5-10 Luke 15: 11-32	SGP 33 CH3 77 CH3 90 CH3 85 CG69	God forgave my sin Father of heaven Lead us, heavenly father O for a heart Kyrie Eleison
Good Friday	Isaiah 53 Mark 15 Luke 22: 66-71 Luke 23 Mark 14: 32- 15:41	CH3 259 CH3 241 CH3 254 SGP 114 CG128	In the cross of Christ I go There is a green hill When I survey Were you there The Servant King
Good news	Mark 1: 1-8 John 3: 16-21 Romans 1: 16-17 2 Cor. 3: 12-18	SGP45 CH3 130 CH3 475 CG 130	How lovely on the mountains Lord thy word abideth We have heard a joyful sound There's a spirit in the air
Grace	2 Cor. 12: 7-10 Ephesians 1: 3-8 Ephesians 2: 4-10	SGP 9 CH3 94 CH3 216	Amazing Grace O Jesus strong and true What grace, O Lord
Holy Land	Psalm 122 Luke 19: 37-44	CH3 4 CH3 312	How lovely is they dwelling place Behold the mountain of the Lord
Holy Spirit	Ezekiel 36: 23-28 John 14: 15-20 Acts 1: 6-11	CH3 104 CH3 11 SGP 4	Come Holy Spirit come Jesus stand among us All over the world

	Galatians 5: 16-23 Acts 2: 1-11	CH3 106 CG32 CG 130	Holy Spirit, Truth Divine Enemy of apathy There's a spirit in the air
Hope	Romans 5: 1-5 1 Cor. 15: 12-20 2 Cor. 3: 12-18	CH3 396 CH3 92 SGP 107	Behold the amazing gift of love Lord of all hopefulness Through the love of God
Joy	Luke 15: 1-10 John 15: 1-11 Romans 15: 10-13 Phil. 1: 3-11 Psalm 100	CH3 366 CH3 111 SGP 120 CH3 296 CG68	Sing to the Lord a joyful song Jesus good above all other You shall go out with joy Rejoice the Lord is King Jubilate everybody
Justice	Lev. 19: 11-18 Micah 6: 6-8 Matthew 25: 31-46	CH3 323 CG1 CG 67	Thy kingdom come A touching place Jesus Christ is waiting
Keeping Sunday Special	Lev. 19: 1-2 Isaiah 58: 13-14 Jer. 17: 19-27 Luke 4: 16-21	SGP 105 MP 97 CH3 76 CG 66	This is the day I will enter his gates Dear Lord and Father Jesus calls us here to meet him
Leadership	Acts 20: 28-35 Luke 9: 46-47	CH3 510 SGP 34 CG 100	Lord of light Go, tell everyone One more step
Light	John 1: 1-7 John 3: 18-21 Ephesians 5: 6-14 1 John 1: 5-7 Revelation 22: 1-5	CH3 32 CG21 CH3 34 MP 714 SGP 102 CG 139 CH3 53	Immortal invisible Christ be our light Lord of all being Lord, the light of your love is shining The spirit lives We are marching in the light of God Before the day draws near its ending
Love	John 13: 31-35 Romans 8: 31-39 Ephesians 3: 14-21 Phil. 2: 2-11 1 John 4: 7-21	SGP 2 CH3 437 MP11 CH3 218 CH3 144 CG 80	A new commandment Love divine And can it be There's a wideness in God's mercy God is love Love is the touch
Mental Health	1 Kings 19:4-12 Luke 4: 33-37 Luke 8: 26-39	SGP 24 CH3 52 CG 138	Do not be afraid At even when the sun was set We cannot measure how you heal
Mission	Isaiah 40: 1-11 Isaiah 43: 8-13 Malachi 3:1, 16-18 Matthew 28: 18-20	CH3 164 MP 261 SGP 4 SGP 34	Tell out my soul We've a story to tell All over the world Go tell everyone

	Acts 1: 1-14	SGP 33	God forgave my sin
	2 Cor. 5: 14-21	CH3 463	Forth in thy name
	Philem. 1: 1-7	CG8	As a fire is meant for burning
New life in Christ	Romans 6: 4-11	SGP 72	Living Lord
	Ephesians 4: 17-24	CH3 685	I am trusting thee, Lord Jesus
	Matthew 11: 25-30	CG 122	Take this moment
Occult, ban on	Isaiah 8: 16-20	MP 126	Jesus the name high overall
	Isaiah 47: 8-15	CH3 495	O Lord our God arise
	Revelation 22: 12-17	CH3 494	Thou whose almighty word
Peace	Psalms 46	CH3 109	Spirit of God
	Luke 1: 67-80	SGP 62	Lead us, O Father
	John 14: 27-29	CG141	What shall we pray?
	Romans 5: 1-11	CH3 395	Father of peace
	Ephesians 6: 10-18	CH3 322	Thy kingdom come O God
	Phil. 4: 4-9	SGP 76	Make me a channel
	Col. 3: 12-17	MP 538	Peace I give to you
Prayer	Matthew 6: 5-15	CH3 451	Almighty Father
	Luke 11: 1-13	SGP 115	What a friend
	Luke 18: 1-14	CH3 667	Approach my soul
	Mark 14: 32-39	CG 120	Stay with me
		CG 143	We lay our broken world
Prisoners	Psalms 107: 1-3		
	10-16, 43	CH3 160	Hark the glad sound
	Matthew 25: 31-40	SGP 118	Will you come and follow me
	Luke 4: 16-21	CH3 413	Jesus shall reign
	Hebrews 13: 1-3		
Protection for children	Psalms 27: 1, 7-14	CH3 356	My God, how wonderful thou art
	Isaiah 49: 1-4, 15-16	CH3 676	Hark my soul
	Luke 21: 14-19		
	Matthew 2: 13-21	CG1	A touching place
Reconciliation	Romans 5: 1-11	MP 248	To God be the glory
	Ephesians 2: 11-22	SGP 29	For the healing of the nations
		CH3 380	Man of sorrows
	2 Cor. 5: 16-21	CG 124	We who live by
Salvation	Luke 8: 11-15	SGP 22	Colours of day
	John 3: 14-16	CH3 293	The saviour died
	Acts 16: 25-34	CH3 530	Give praise and thanks
	Romans 10: 5-13	CH3 101	Blest be the everlasting God
	John 1: 29-34	CG 13	Behold the lamb
Service	Exodus 3: 1-12	CH3 428	Lord of creation

	Isaiah 6: 1-8	CH3 462	Take my life
	Matthew 20: 25-28	CH3 436	O Master let me walk
	John 13:12-15	SGP 21	Christ's is the world
	John 13: 3-15	CG 128	The Servant King
		CG 105	Sent by the Lord am I
Standards	Exodus 20: 1-4		
	7-8, 12-17	CH3 87	Be thou my vision
	Ephesians 4: 1-6	CH3 434	O Jesus I have promised
	Psalms 90: 13-17	CG 63	Inspired by love and anger
	Matthew 20: 1-16		
	2 Cor. 5: 16-19		
Studying Scripture	Nehemiah 8:1-3,		
	5-6, 9-12	CH3 129	Look upon us blessed Lord
	Mark 4: 14-20	CH3 635	Almighty God
	2 Cor. 4: 1-6	MP 316	Break thou the bread of life
	Ephesians 3: 14-19	CG 117	Spirit of God
Teaching	Deut. 11:1, 18-21	CH3 213	It feel upon a summer day
	Matthew 18: 1-7	CH3 447	Lord and master who has called us
	Luke 22: 14-20	CG 124	The hand of heaven
	John 21:15-17	CG 78	Lord we came to ask your healing
Temptation	Luke 4: 1-13	CH3 482	Yield not to temptation
	James 1: 12-18	CH3 211	Jesus calls us
		CG37	Forty days and forty nights
Thanksgiving	1 Chron 16: 8-11	CH3 29	To render thanks
	Ephesians 1: 3-8	CH3 366	Sing to the Lord
	Phil. 4: 4-7	CH3 368	Now thank we all our God
	Psalms 121	CG 133	Today I awake
Unity	John 17: 1-26	SGP 13	Bind us together
		CH3 424	Thy hand, O God, has guided
	Col, 3: 12-17	CG8	As a fire is meant for burning
Wisdom	Matthew 25: 1-13	MP 58	Give me oil
	Luke 2: 41-52	CH3 144	God is love
	James 3: 13-18	CH3 88	God of grace
	Proverbs 9: 10-12	CG 147	Wisdom's table

WORSHIP SAMPLER

The worship sampler gives a selection of patterns of worship, with scripture readings, hymns or songs and prayers. They can be used as they stand, or better still, they can be adapted and used as a springboard for your own ideas.

The selection begins with a series of worship patterns . Each one explores a fruit of the spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22 – ‘But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control.’ This series could be followed for a number of meetings, giving a theme to the worship. Other Bible passages which lend themselves to similar use include The Lord’s Prayer, The Ten Commandments, Love is....(1 Corinthians 13) or the Armour of God (Ephesians 6)

Sample patterns also include worship for the different seasons of the Guild Year as well as for contemporary issues.

The important this is to use this selection as a resource and an inspiration, and to experiment with format and presentations. Think about using other Bible translations or substituting alternative hymns. Develop a style which feels comfortable and enjoy the worship!

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS.....

.....Love

Introduction

Israel, the Lord who created you says:

Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by your name – you are mine. Isaiah 43: 1-2 (JB)

Hymn SGP 24 Do not be afraid

Reading Hosea 11: 1-4 (JB)

When Israel was a child, I loved him and called him out of Egypt.

But the more I called to them, the further they went from me; they have offered sacrifice to the Baals and set their offerings smoking before the idols.

I myself taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in my arms; yet they have not understood that I was the one looking after them.

I led them with reins of kindness with leading-strings of love.

I was like someone who lifts an infant close against the cheek; stopping down to him I gave him his food.

Prayers

God you are father and mother to us all.

And you love us.

Your love is patient and kind,

Your love is not jealous or conceited or proud.

Your love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable,

Your love does not keep a record of our wrongs.

Your love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth.

Your love never gives up, and the faith, hope and patience of your love never end.

Your love was there for us from the beginning, like the love of a mother for her child in the womb.
 Your love is tender and nurtures us.
 Your love is strong; and dares anything to save us.
 Your love is ample; and transforms us into the likeness of Christ.
 As a child learns to love from loving parents, help us so to learn.
 Grant us the grace to grow in this love, revealed to us through Jesus Christ
 AMEN

<i>Closing Hymn</i>	CH3 115	Come down O Love Divine
<i>or</i>	CG57	I come with joy

....Joy and Peace

<i>Hymn</i>	CH3 92	Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy
	SGP 89	Oh the love of my Lord
	SGP 76	Make me a channel of your peace
	CG 103	Put peace into each other's hands
	MP 255	We have heard a joyful sound

Reading Galatians 5: 22

Place a free-standing cross on your table. Play two minutes of a tape of joyful singing followed by two minutes of a tape of the sounds of water. Use a battery as a visual aid. Point out that it has a negative and a positive end and both are necessary for it to do its job. Joy is often seen as active, and peace as the opposite. Emphasise that both are needed for our spiritual well-being, if we are to function properly as Christians.

Reading John 16: 19-22

Prayer

Almighty God, how joyfully we can turn to you – joyful because you have given us hope, a reason for living, peace in our hearts and a risen, living Saviour to follow.

We thank you and pray for those who show your joy in what appears to us to be negative circumstances:

- Those who are disabled, mentally or physically
- Those who are poor and deprived
- Those who mourn

Thank you Lord for your Holy Spirit - the spirit that puts a new song on our lips and new joy in our hearts, and blesses us with the peace that passes all understanding. AMEN

As a blessing, you might like to play 'A Gaelic Blessing: Deep peace of the running wave to you' from the CD *Gloria – the sacred music of John Rutter* (Collegium Records) or speak the words are printed on p120.

.....Patience and kindness

Hymn SGP 111 We are one in the spirit

Reading 1 Colossians 1: 10-12 (NEB)

We pray that you may bear the fruit in active goodness of every kind, and grow in the knowledge of God. May he strengthen you, in his glorious might, with ample power to meet whatever comes with fortitude, patience and joy; and to give thanks to the Father who has made you fit to share the heritage of God's people in the realm of light.

Reading 2 2 Samuel 9: 1-3, 7 (NEB)

David asked, 'Is any members of Saul's family left, to whom I can show true kindness for Jonathan's sake?' 'There was a servant of Saul's family called Ziba; and he was summoned to David. The kings asked, 'Are you Ziba?', and he answered 'Your servant, Sir.' So the king said, 'Is no member of Saul's family still alive to whom I may show the kindness that God requires?' 'Yes' said Ziba, there is a son of Jonathan still alive, he is a cripple, lame in both feet.'

Prayer

Gracious, loving God, your patience and kindness are infinite. Christ showed both in the loving way he dealt with those in need; in the way he dealt with the seeming inability of his disciples to understand or believe the evidence of their own eyes. In all their failures and betrayal, he showed patience and kindness.

Let us pause for a moment.

Think about those who make you impatient, those to whom it is difficult to be kind. Think how you show restraint in public, then 'take it out' on those nearest you who may not understand why. Think of how lack of thought, inconsiderate words and actions may have caused hurt and bitterness.

(silence)

Forgive us and help us to show patience and kindness to others for the sake of Jesus. Love is patient , love is kind. Grant us your love in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name.
Amen

Hymn SGP 71 (vv 1,3,5) Lord God, your love has called us here

The Grace

.....Goodness

<i>Hymns</i>	SGP 98	Spirit of the Living God
	CH3 388	The King of Love my Shepherd is
	CH3 395	Father of Peace and God of Love

Think of Holman Hunt's picture 'The Light of the World', and imagine the big lamp shining into the innermost parts of your being. Probably, like me, you will be conscious of the dirty bits that you do not want to be exposed, and would wish to hurry up with the cleaning process – or put out the light!

Reading Ephesians 5: 8-14 (NIV)

But you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible. This is why it is said, 'Wake up! O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

Prayer

Jesus, Light of the world, help us not to fear your light, but rather to welcome it so that we may quickly clear out even the smallest speck that keeps from being clean and good. Amen

.....Faithfulness

This is part of a letter. Imagine it is to you from an older Christian friend (3 John 2-6, GNB):

My dear friend, I pray that everything may go well with you and that you may be in good health – as I know you are well in spirit. I was so happy when some Christian brothers arrived and told me how faithful you are to the truth – just as you always live in the truth. Nothing makes me happier than to hear that my children live in the truth.

My dear friend, you are so faithful in the work you do for your fellow-Christians, even when they are strangers. They have spoken to the church here about your love. Please help them to continue their journey in a way that will please God.

When you consider your commitments – as an elder, perhaps, or Sunday School teacher, as a homemaker or a worker elsewhere – do you think you would deserve a letter like that?

Prayer:

We praise you, Lord, for your love for us, and we praise you for your spirit within us. Forgive us that we often fail you and live fruitless lives because we don't let him take over. We thank you for your duties in our homes, churches and neighbourhoods and ask your Spirit to keep us sensitive to the needs of others and ready to help with work, deed or company. In this age of shoddy workmanship and instant results, keep us faithful and fruitful 'doing all things heartily, as to the Lord' that we may be your 'good and faithful servants.' Amen

<i>Hymns</i>	CH3 431	Jesus, Master, whose I am
	SOF 519/CH3 462	Take my life
	CG 50	Here I am, Lord
	MP 3	Abba, Father

.....Humility and self-control

Reading

Mark 9:33-37 (GNB)

They came to Capernaum and, after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, 'What were you arguing about on the road?'

But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing amongst themselves about who was the greatest. Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples and said to them, 'whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all.'

Then he took a child and made him stand in front of them. He put his arms round him and said to them, 'whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me.'

Prayer

Lord, you've done it again –

...turned the values of the world upside-down

...chosen weakness, in human eyes, as a source of strength

...reversing the usual order of things which puts self first

...challenging us to forget our self-importance and follow the way of love – as you did

Father, give us grace

...to speak the truth with child-like simplicity

...to understand the truth with childlike directness

...to welcome the call to service with childlike eyes which see only the need without thought of righteousness. Amen

Hymn

CH3 76 v 1

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,

Forgive our foolish ways;

Reclothe us in our rightful mind;

In purer lives they service find.

In deeper reverence, praise.

Reading

Lord, the anger's there however much I may deny it. I use the Christian clichés, speak of love and service, walking second miles. But still it's there.

Resentment, irritation when things don't go my way. The bitter comment, smoke-screened with a smile, disguised as disappointment.

But underneath I'm seething. Forgiveness stored away in some locked cupboard of my mind.

Unopened, and the key misplaced.

Lord won't you force the door? But even as I ask, I know the answer lies with me. It lies with me to make a move, to recognise just where I'm at and why. And then to work with you towards that partnership of love, not forced but freely given, that casts out fear.'

Eddie Askew⁸

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ

You have given us the perfect example of self-control. When the disciples were slow to understand, you were patient. When the sick crowded round with their incessant demands, you gave your healing power freely.

When false accusations were brought against you, you kept silence.

When men nailed you to the cross, you forgave them.

Holy Spirit, enter your hearts now
to teach us humility and self-control
so that anger will be subdued by patience
irritation will be replaced by generosity
hurt will give way to that love which endures. Amen

Hymn

CH3 76 v5

Drop thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease
Take from our souls the strain and stress
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.

SAMPLE PATTERNS

.....Beginnings

Hymns CH3 432 May the mind of Christ my saviour
 MP 228 Here from the world we turn

Readings from John 1: 1-14
 Hebrews 13: 1-8
 Ezekiel 36: 24-28

Prayer

Heavenly Father, for your wonderful work, the Bible , and all the promises it contains, we praise and thank you. We marvel at your great love and mercy. We thank you for all new beginnings , but especially for the beginning of our journey of faith. You know each one of us so well – our shortcoming , doubts and fears – forgive us Lord. Help the seed of faith you have planted to flourish and bear fruit. For those who have not yet begun to understand and trust you, we pray that your light and love will flood their lives.
Lord, fill us with newness of life that we may live our lives constantly praying and rejoicing in you our Saviour, the Alpha and Omega of us all. Amen.

.....Caring

If our love for Christ were stronger, richer, deeper, we would not calculate so closely how much we can afford to give or do. Love in its supreme moment does not stop at a little. It does not weigh, measure, calculate or restrain its impulses. *Span.*⁹

Hymn SGP 54 Jesus calls us here to meet him

Reading Matthew 9: 9-13 (NEB)

As he passed on from there Jesus saw a man named Matthew at his seat in the custom-house; and he said to him 'Follow me'. And Matthew rose and followed him. When Jesus was at table in the house, many bad characters – tax gatherers and others – were seated with him and his disciples. The Pharisees noticed this and said to his disciples, 'Why is it that your master eats with tax gatherers and sinners?' Jesus heard them and said, 'It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. Go and learn what that text means, 'I require mercy, not sacrifice'. I did not come to invite virtuous people, but sinners.'

Prayer

Loving God, we give you praise and thanks that in the life and deeds of Jesus we see what you are like. We thank you that when he called Matthew, he chose one who in the eyes of religious Jews was an outcast, some 'beyond the pale.' Forgive us that even as we claim to love and serve you, we are making judgements based on prejudice and bigotry, lack of knowledge, on colour, class or appearance. Help us to see Christ there, alongside those in our society who are outcast, people who need our care, our loving concern. Help us to listen so that we hear what is really being said, and not what we've already decided it is. Help us to speak out against injustice and wrongdoing. Caring takes

courage, commitment, sacrifice. Strengthen our love so that we do not 'weigh, measure, calculate or restrain its impulse.' In the name of Jesus.

Hymns SGP 21 Christ's is the world in which we move
 Or SOF 519(CH3 462) Take my life

Closing prayers

Go with us into your world, to see it through your eyes, and to love it as your spirit enables us. Amen

.....Celebration

It's great to have something to celebrate: perhaps the opening of a new building, a special anniversary, or even just the start of a new session. And it's good to be able to share our joy in our worship.

Praise SOF 69 Come on and celebrate
 SGP 120 You shall go out with joy
 CH3 39 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
 MP 242 Hosanna
 CG 18 Come all you people

Reading Psalm 150 (GNB)

Praise God in his Temple!
Praise his strength in heaven!
Praise him for the mighty things he has done
Praise his supreme greatness

Praise him with trumpets
Praise him with harps and lyres
Praise him with drums and dancing
Praise him with harps and flutes
Praise him with cymbals
Praise him with loud cymbals
Praise the Lord, all living creatures

Praise the Lord!

Prayer

O Lord our God
Now the times are filled full
Now is the day of wholeness
Now is your place within mankind
Now the time of liberation has arrived
Now is the celebration of the kingdom. Amen

.....Communication

For the Christian, communication is active love

Let us in silence think of those to whom we have listened today. What did we hear?

Let us in silence think of what we have heard God say to us today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you always heard what people are really saying. You heard the pain behind the mask of words. Forgive us that the voice we most like to hear is our own. Help us to develop a listening ear that we may be able to support friends and neighbours in any kind of need. Help us in this to be like Jesus.

We communicate by touch

Let us in silence think of those we have touched today. A handshake, a hug, an embrace, or perhaps, in anger, a slap or rebuff.

Prayer

Lord your touch was always therapeutic....it never repelled or hurt. Help us to offer the touch of compassion, the hand of friendship, the hug of encouragement, the embrace of love, so that we affirm one another and share the love of Christ with others.

We communicate by speaking

Let us remember in silence what we have said today.

Are there things we wish we had left unsaid?

Are there times we have been silent when we should have spoken?

Are there words of encouragement, support and love to recall?

The greatest communication was on the cross. Jesus gave himself utterly for us so that we might make contact in a real way with God. Let us think in silence of ways in which we can serve others and give ourselves to them.

Prayer

Lord, we worship you for your total selfless act of love. We can never repay you or thank you adequately. We can only marvel at being the children who receive such boundless love. Fill us with such joyous response that we share this love in serving others that our whole lives may speak of you. Amen

Hymns

SGP 2

A new commandment

SGP 60

Fill us with your love

MP 411

Let there be love shared among us

.....Family

<i>Hymns</i>	SGP 13	Bind us together, Lord
	CH3 522	Our Father, by whose name
	MP 376	Jesus put this song into our hearts

Readings Matthew 7: 7-13
 Acts 10: 1-8
 Psalm 68: 4-6

Prayer

Ever-present Father, we come to you as your children, members of your family. We thank you for our Saviour who came as a baby and grew up in a family. Father, we thank you for our homes, for the people who raised us and for the wider family of your church. We praise you for the privilege of becoming your children through faith in Jesus. And so we pray for the children of today who so desperately need to know you and grow in your loving care. Forgive us, Lord, when we fail to communicate your love for us all.

We ask you to intervene where families are in trouble – where there is no love, comfort and guidance. Keep us mindful of our own belssins and help us to share them in your service. Today we trust as our heavenly Father and commit ourselves to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. We pray this in the name of your own dear Son who gave himself willingly so that we might call you Abba, Father. Amen

.....Grief/ loss

Introduction

Life begins in loss. In the very act of birth, we lose the comfort and security of our mother's womb and are forced out to face a strange and unfamiliar world. The act of birth is inseparable from the pain of letting go. That experience of loss and new birth continues lifelong.

When we think of loss, we tend to think of the aching grief of losing a loved one in death. But loss, and grief, play a larger part in our lives. We leave people and places and are left by them We may lose our opportunities, our dreams, our hopes. There are times we may feel we have lost ourselves, our identities, the person we long to be. We may lose our health suddenly, or as we age we may lose our eyesight, our hearing, our mobility – our waistline! We may know the grief of being separated from each other by distance or disagreement. Whatever our loss, our grief can be great.

Meditative prayer

(to be spoken by one, two or four people, and an explanation that silence will be used)

Voice 1 Living, loving God, our Parent who cares. We bring to you now in the silence any loss, any grief, large or small, deserved or undeserved, expected or unexpected.

Pause

Voice 2 We have lost those we loved, Lord. We are separated and sometimes feel full of anger and confusion yet so alone and empty. The future has changed,. No one truly understands, We lift our thoughts and feelings to you

Silence

Voice 3 We lose our health, Lord. We feel cheated as body and mind fail us. We face restricted lives, and the shackles of ill-health are irksome and heavy. We lift our thoughts and feelings to you.

Silence

Voice 4 We have lost ourselves, the people we long to be. We live lives of lies and have lost our way. We lift our thoughts and feelings to you.

Silence

Voice 1 Healing God, take our grief, share our pain, ease its rawness and ache. May the oil of your love and understanding bring balm to our troubled spirits.
Only crushed wheat can be made into bread. Only tramped grapes can be made into wine. May our sometimes crushed and tramped lives be made into something beautiful and worthwhile. Amen

Reading

Whatever we lose or suffer in life let us remember.....

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ, Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8: 35, 37-39 (NIV)

Comment

We have the choice. We can remain in our hurt, or with human and divine help we can accept, adapt, change and grow. Even in the most devastating loss, we can find the opportunity to create something new, so that the loss need not be futile. As the act of birth is inseparable from the pain of letting go, so in the pain of letting go, we can find new birth.

Hymns	SGP 21	Christ's is the world
	CH3 677	O Love that will not let me go
	CG40	God give us life
	CG 138	We cannot measure how you heal
	MP 281	I lift my eyes to the quiet hills

.....The Media

This is based on the hymn 'May the mind of Christ my saviour' (CH3 432). It can be used by two people, one leading prayer, the other reading and all the verses should be sung by everyone.

The Media

TV, radio, newspapers, video, film, ...our age is bombarded by the media in all its forms. We are inevitably touched and influenced by it. As Christians, we respond by positively affirming the good and beneficial and by discerning and rejecting the bad. Let us thank God for the freedom and ability to use our minds and apply our understanding to discern the truth in all media presentations.

Read Hebrews 8: 10 (NIV)

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.

Philippians 4: 8-9 (NIV)

Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things

Sing together verse 1 of 'May the mind of Christ':

May the mind of Christ my saviour
Live in me from day to day
By his love and power controlling
All I do or say

Prayer

Lord we praise you that you are holy, pure and righteous. We thank you that by your Holy Spirit you live within us and by your grace will help us to discern good from bad, pure from corrupt, truth from lies. Guard our minds and grant us wisdom for Christ's sake.

Read Psalm 119: 105 (NIV)

For your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path

John 8: 31-31 (NIV)

Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and truth will set you free.

Sing verse 2

May the word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour
So that all may see I triumph
Only through his power

Prayer

Father we thank you and praise you for your word given so that we might hear and believe. We thank you for Christ your final word sent to bring life and power. May we claim that power in our daily lives so that we may become salt and light to those around us and influence our homes and communities for good.

Read Philippians 4: 4-7 (NIV)

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petitions, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Sing verse 3

May the peace of God my father
Rule my life in everything
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing

Prayer

Lord, when we see TV news bulletins and read in papers of terrible suffering and agony in the world, we are overwhelmed. We feel so helpless. Lord, grant us your peace that we may turn our distress into prayer while doing all we can, acknowledging that your Father's care extends to all your children.

Read 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3 (NIV)

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames

Sing verse 4

May the love of Jesus fill me
As the waters fill the sea
Him exalting, self-abasing
This is victory

Prayer

Lord, love is debased in so much of the media. It is fickle, selfish, lustful. Thank you that your love is so different and sets such a high standard, and thank you for every programme and article which highlights this for us. Bless all Christian broadcasting and writing, that your love may reach out to others.

Read Hebrews 12: 1-3 (NIV)

Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance, the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Sing verse 5

May I run the race before me
Strong and brave to face the foe
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for being our companion day by day, Thank you for the enrichment that TV, radio and newspapers bring to life. Thank you that you provide in Jeus Christ the most powerful influence in the world. Stir us to be active participants....joyfully contributing to life in the power and love of Jesus. For his glory we ask all these things.

.....**Missed Opportunities**

<i>Hymns</i>	SGP 48	I need thee every hour
	CH3 69	Come let us to the Lord our God
	CH3 81	My faith looks up to thee
	CG 50	Here I am, Lord

Reader 1 Any then who knows the good he ought to do, and doesn't do it, sins.
(James 4:17 – NIV)

Reader 2 So often we feel miserable when we realise too late what we ought to have said or done. Perhaps we are aware that we have been distinctly unhelpful or unkind. We know we've let our Lord down yet again and we feel useless – failures – everything negative.

Reader 3 Remember Peter? He failed his Lord too and wept bitterly. Let's read how Jesus dealt with him.

[Reading John 21: 15-17]

Narrator When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter...

Jesus Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?

Peter Yes Lord, you know that I love you

Jesus Feed my lambs

Narrator Again Jesus said....

Jesus Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?

Peter Yes Lord, you know that I love you.

Jesus Take care of my sheep

Narrator The third time Jesus said to him....

Jesus Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Narrator Peter was hurt because Jesus asked the third time, 'Do you love me'

Peter Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.

Jesus Feed my sheep

Prayer Loving, Heavenly Father, we thank you for your wonderful forgiving love for each one of us. Thank you for giving us the story of Peter's failure and of how Jesus your son so tenderly restored him to a position of trust. Father, when we fall and let you down, and feel really sorry about it, draw us back to yourself, so that you can forgive us, and set us on your way again. Thank you for the reassurance of that verse – 1 John 1: 9 which reminds us that 'if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just and will forgive us our sins'.

As a blessing 'The Lord bless you and keep you' from the CD *Gloria – The sacred music of John Rutter* (Collegium Records)

.....Relationships

Hymn SGP 115 What a friend we have in Jesus (Tune: Scarlet Ribbons)

Reading Matthew 25: 34-40

Give everyone a card from a well-shuffled pack of Happy Families cards. Then ask them to find the other members of their family. Point out that this can only be done by relating to and communicating with one another. You could ask a member of Couple Counselling (Formerly Relate) or another caring society to be your guest speaker.

Prayer

Lord God, we praise and thank you that we are created in your image and to live tighter in unity. Forgive us, Lord, if we have been responsible for any disharmony, and help us through your Spirit, to put matters right. We bring you to all who endure broken relationships. Thank you for your promise of healing for the broken-hearted. May we always look to our Lord Jesus Christ for the way to live with others. Thank you Lord for the potential we all have to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

.....Salt in Society

Hymn CH3 485 Lord, speak to me
CG 122 Take this moment time and space

Reading Mark 9: 50 (GNB)

Salt is good but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have the salt of friendship among yourselves, and live in peace with one another.

'Switch off the television!'

There are too many children past crying
too many parents past caring

too many governments past sacrificing:

I loathe to see
to be shown undeniably
that my life is merely
a drop in the ocean.

Yet
one drop of dye
changes
all of the mixture

One candle's flame
lights
all round this dark room

One pinch of salt
flavours
all of my casserole

Creator God
give us the courage
to change our world's hue;
Let more of your light
spread out from ourselves
giving back to this planet
the flavour of you.

Jane Grayshon¹⁰

Father, forgive us for the times we feel useless; when we feel tempted to shut out the world and its problems; forgive us for not trying because we feel there is nothing we can do.

Lord, speak to us now –
Lead us to that we may guide others to you. Strengthen us, so that we may stretch out a loving hand to those in need. Use us as seems best to you, for in your strength all things are possible. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

<i>Hymn</i>	SGP 76	Make me a channel of your peace (<i>said or sung by all</i>)
Or	CG 119	Spirit of Truth and Grace

.....Wisdom

Hymns	CH3 89	Guide me of thou great Jehovah
	SGP 93	Seek ye first
Or	CG 12	Be still for the presence of the Lord
	MP 527	O word of God incarnate

Reading Proverbs 1: 7 or 1 Kings 3: 5-14

Place an owl figure or picture of an owl where it can be seen by members. Why was an owl the Greek symbol of wisdom? Could it be because it appears to be always listening? We must teach ourselves to listen to God – therein lies wisdom.

Prayer

Lord, help us to be still and listen to you – give us ears to hear. Solomon valued wisdom above everything in this life. We praise you for the wonder of this world you have given us and our thirst for knowledge. We have so much to learn – we need to be sensitive to others – forgive us our impatience. Can we be the good listeners our friends and neighbours need? Can we bring peace to their souls with the good news of our Saviour? We ask for your Holy Spirit to help us be wise in the ways of our Lord and to ever look to him for guidance.

Bless those in positions of authority who teach or to have to make momentous decisions. We look to your Lord the source of all wisdom. Amen.

Christmas

Introduction

No Royal Palace for the infant prince born to save the world. Jesus born in a cold, draughty stable. From those humble surroundings sprang a life that was to enrich us beyond measure. Born for us, a child who would be called ‘wonderful counsellor’, ‘Prince of Peace’, basing all his power on right and justice.

<i>Hymns</i>	JP 93	See him lying in a bed of straw (Calypso Carol)
	CH3 179	See! In yonder manger low

Readings Luke 1: 26-38
Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7; Luke 2: 1-21

(Four voices could be used for the readings)

Prayer

Father God, the people who walked in darkness saw a great light.

Today, as we walk in the shadows, we ask that you spread the light of Jesus, your Son, upon us. As we celebrate the birthday of that Son, we pray that we will remain mindful of the reason for his coming.

The Christmas that everyone sees is late-night shopping, crowded streets, toys in windows, turkey, plum pudding and parcels under the tree.

Let us remember as we wonder at the sparkle of tree lights and tinsel, that a little child came into our lives to shed his light upon us, not just at Christmas but until the end of time.

Hymn CH3 172 O Little town of Bethlehem

Closing Prayer

Deep peace of the running wave to you

Deep peace of the flowing air to you

Deep peace of the shining stars to you

Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you *Gaelic blessing*

New Year

I said to the man that stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better that light and safer than a known way!' So I went forth and finding the hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And he led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

*M. Louise Haskins*¹¹

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to you at the start of a new year, knowing what has been, knowing your faithfulness to us, knowing you were there to comfort and guide us when times were difficult, knowing you are a God of love and mercy. We confess we have sinned against you in many ways, but we can make a fresh start, for through the death of Jesus we can be forgiven and put right with you.

Your hands were nailed to the cross for us, Lord. Now you stretch them out to us. Help us to grasp them daily. Only then can we be unafraid to what the future holds. We pray for those who need you – those who are ill, troubled, depressed or just downright weary. Fill them and us, O Lord with your Holy Spirit and help us to remember that our times are in your hands.

Hymns SGP 69 Look forward in faith
 CH3 424 Thy hand, O God, has guided
 CG74 Lord for the years
 MP 269 I do not know what lies ahead

Lent

During the period of Lent, we prepare to commemorate the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remembering Christ's struggle – the temptations in the wilderness; the loneliness of Gethsemane – we bring to him our own difficulties and concerns as we seek to be 'fashioned to a truer beauty of his hand.'

<i>Opening Praise</i>	SGP 114	Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
OR	CG 84	Mayenziwe (Your will be done on earth)
	CG 98	One bread one body

Reading Matthew 4: 1-11 Luke 22: 39-44

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now,
For all that you have done for us on the cross
For all that you have promised us
What can we offer in exchange?

Our hands are empty
Our hearts are often rebellious
Our faith is smaller than the mustard seed
But with you is mercy and the power to change us

Let us bring to God the things and the people who concern us

*[People may contribute as they wish, or the leader may list concerns, allowing time for silent prayer.
Each prayer may end either with the spoken response*

Lord in your mercy
HEAR OUR PRAYER

Or the sung response O Lord hear my prayer (SGP 85)

After the last prayer, the leader concludes:]

Oh Christ, the master carpenter
who at the last through wood and nails
purchased our whole salvation.
Wield well your tools in the workshop of your world
so that we who came rough-hewn to the bench
may here be fashioned to a truer beauty of your hand.
We ask it for your own name's sake
Amen

(From *A Wee Worship Book*¹²)

Annual General Meeting

Opening Hymn As this is a time for looking back and planning the way forward, it is appropriate to begin with such hymns as:

SGP 37	Great is thy faithfulness
CH3 366	Sing to the Lord a joyful song
CH3 29	To render thanks unto the Lord

Reading Colossians 3: 12-17
Or Ephesians 4: 1-12
Or Romans 12: 4-13

Prayer

Dear father, we come into your presence with grateful and thankful hearts for all your goodness to us. We look back over a busy year in our Guild branch and thank you for all the happy times we have shared and for all that we have learned of the work of your church.

We ask your blessing on those who are not with us tonight. May they know that we are thinking of them, and that you are near to them.

Accept our thanks for those who have held office throughout the year, and help each one of us be ready to serve you in any way we can, knowing that you will give us the strength to answer your call. You have helped us so abundantly Lord. Forgive us that so often we take you for granted, and help us to show our thankfulness in the lives we live.

Be with us now as we turn our minds to the business of the meeting, and help us to remember that all we do is for you, our loving heavenly Father. Amen

<i>Closing Hymn</i>	SGP 90	One more step along the world I go
	CH3 462	Take my life and let it be
	CH3 428	Lord of creation, to thee be all praise

Closing Prayer

Father, we commit into your hands the work of this night. Accept our thanks for the sense of your presence and for the joy we have felt. Be with those becoming leaders for the first time. May they prove your faithfulness to them as they seek to serve you. For all who lead, we thank you, Lord, and ask your blessing on them. Be with us now as we go our separate ways. Keep us mindful of your loving presence, and help us to share with our neighbours the love you have shown to us. In Jesus' name, we ask it
Amen

Whose we are and Whom we serve

As this is the motto of the Guild, adapted from Acts 27:23, you may wish to have it displayed in your meeting place.

Hymns	SGP 119	You are worthy
	CH3 445	Make me a captive, Lord
	CH3 412	Will your anchor hold?

Try to imagine yourself involved in the following situation:

Reading Acts 27: 13-26 (NIV)

[Use two voices; Narrator and Paul]

When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the 'Northeaster', swept along from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sand-bars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. On the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said, 'Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have saved yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God *whose I am and whom I serve* stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.'

Note how your fear ebbed when Paul took command, proclaiming the reason for his confidence.

Read again verse 23 and 24:

Last night an angel of the God *whose I am and whom I serve* stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul.'

Paul believed God and acted on his belief. Note how his fellow travellers reacted to the tone of authority and allowed him to take command. Paul's total commitment to God gave him total confidence in God. Is our belief in God so strong that we 'serve' him by speaking and acting with confidence in his name? Let us think about our commitment.

Read Romans 12:1 (NIV)

Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.

When last did you make a sacrifice to God – of time, money, energy, praise or whatever?

Pause for time of silent worship

Prayer

Father God, when we think of your wonderful love for us shown so perfectly in Jesus, surely our response should be like Paul's. Help us, Lord, to make that decision and give our whole selves over to you, to use as you will. Then we too will have our confidence in the God 'whose we are and whom we serve.' Amen

Epilogue for World Mission

This could follow an illustrated talk on the work of one of our mission partners, or a part of the world where the church has a particular concern. The final slide, which should be meaningful, depicting perhaps some needy aspect of the work or a peaceful sunset, should remain on the screen as a focal point. With the lights still dimmed, read a few verses from the Bible, for example Ephesians 3: 14-21

Prayer

God, our Father, you have called us to be intercessors for your work in the world, and you have taught us that prayer is without limits or bounds, and is understood by people of every language and creed. We pray for people everywhere, especially for Christians who are, even now, being persecuted for their faith. Give to them, our Father, a sense of your presence with them, and grant them courage to withstand the difficulties they may have to endure. We pray for all who have answered your call to be witnesses in countries that are far from home and family. May they experience joy and fulfilment in their work, knowing that they have been obedient to your call and that you are ever-present with them to direct and uphold and further your work.

[Insert here two sentences concerning the work and personnel shown on the slides]

Our Father, as we pray for your people engaged in your work overseas, we ask that we might be ever-mindful of the tasks they do in your name. Keep us faithful in our support and in our prayer, so that they and we together may be the means of spreading your love, your joy and your saving grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymns	SGP 2	A new commandment
	SGP 29	For the healing of the nations
	SGP 41	Help us accept each other
	CH3 500	Christ for the world we sing!
	MP 178	Go forth and tell
	MP 744	We've a story to tell

An Epilogue with a Challenge

The following could be used as a meditation or a prayer:

As we think of today's world, we would agree that it is a shrinking world; modern technology in travel and communication makes virtually any part of it accessible within hours of departing, and areas of concern are beamed into our living rooms almost the instant they happen. No longer can we turn our backs on the needs of the world, or 'pass the buck' as being someone else's concern. It is laid on our hearts to be mindful of the plight of others, whether on our own doorstep or on the other side of the world.

A long time ago, God confronted Isaiah and said, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' Jesus said, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'

Today he says to each one of us, 'Go then to all peoples everywhere' – in person, through prayer, by giving or befriending. He calls you and me to be his messengers. Do you hear? Do we go?

He wants people to go to China, to Africa, to South America, to Scotland, to *[your locality]* and into all the world. Do we hear? Do we go?

God doesn't call us all to be preachers, teachers, pastors or evangelists, but we are all called to be his witnesses. We are called to give evidence of his love and saving grace. We are called to give a reason for our faith. We are Christ's ambassadors, and he has given us a task. Do we obey? Do we go?

God says to us today, 'whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' AMEN

(adapted from 'Life is for Everyone'¹³)

<i>Hymns</i>	SGP 21	Christ's is the world in which we move
	CH3 494	Thou whose almighty word
	CH3 485	Lord, speak to me

Closing prayer

Let us go out into the world in peace to love and to serve the Lord, and may his blessing go with us and remain with us always. AMEN

The Centenary Hymn

(Tune: Regent Square CH3 354)

Worship we our Lord and Father
As we gather, as we sing
Praise him, praise him, now and ever
Bringing glory to our King
 Worship we our Lord and Father
 Bringing glory to our King

Fellowship we seek and cherish
Friend with friend and stranger too
Sharing troubles, joys and pleasures
Showing love that comes from you
 Fellowship we seek and cherish
 Showing love that comes from you

Service to the world we offer
We should wish to play our part
But we need your strength to aid us
Give us caring loving hearts
 Service to the world we offer
 Give us caring loving hearts

Teach us to give you the glory
When we follow in your way
Worship, fellowship and service
Are your gifts from day to day
 Teach us to give you the glory
 For your gifts from day to day

We your people praise and thank you
For the blessings that we have
Glory, honour, now we give you
Whose we are and whom we serve
 We your people praise and thank you
 Whose we are and whom we serve

Betty Ewart¹⁴

The Commitment Prayer

Today, Lord God, we light a new candle to celebrate new beginnings.

A the light shine s out providing a clear way ahead, give us a new spirit of enthusiasm and determination.

In the light of the your Holy Spirit, we always receive new hope and potential.

Let that new hope and potential be released for good in the Guild and in all our lives.

Lord, in your mercy

Make us rich in love and fellowship

Forgiving and understanding God, help us to use our energy wisely;

To appreciate what we so easily take for granted

To love ourselves imperfect as we are

To love and accept others as they are

To build for the future on the excellence of the past

To be open to every new opportunity

To be forgiving because we know we are forgiven.

Lord, in your mercy,

Make us rich in love and fellowship

Great and glorious God,

as we seek to commit our lives anew in service through the Church of Scotland Guild,

Provide us with your Peace

Lead us in your Light

Give us your Goodness

Grant us your Grace

Protect us with your Power and

Lift us in your love

Lord, in your mercy,

Make us rich in love and fellowship

Almighty God, as sisters and brothers in your church on earth, we seek your blessing on every new adventure. Today, we seek a speak blessing on the Church of Scotland Guild, renewed for a new millennium, ready as never before to open our hearts and our doors to all who seek to affiliate with us in Jesus' name.

Grant us graciousness and compassion

Help us to be slow to anger and rich in love

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord of Love

AMEN

References

- 1 *Windows of Prayer*, Church of Scotland Department of National Mission (out of print)
- 2 David Adam, *Edge of Glory; Prayers in the Celtic tradition* (London:SPCK/Triangle, 1985)
- 3 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (editions available from Hodder and Stoughton, Penguin and Arthur Clarke Books)
- 4 St Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* (editions available from Hodder and Stoughton and Arthur Clarke Books)
- 5 David Adam, *Tides and Seasons* (London SPCK/Triangle 1989)
- 6 Freda Rajotte, 'The Tourist's Prayer', from John Carden (comps) *With all God's People; The New Ecumenical Prayer Cycle* (Geneva; WCC Publications 1989)
- 7 Rosaleen Murray (Scottish Catholic Internationals Aid Fund) Quoted on the front cover of June-August 1993 edition of Church of Scotland Department of World Mission's Prayerline.
- 8 Eddie Askew, *Breaking the Rules* (Leprosy Mission International)
- 9 From SPAN, Australian Presbyterian Women, NSW, Australia)
- 10 Jane Grayshon, *Faith in Flames* (London: Hodder and Stoughton)
- 11 M. Louise Haskins, *The Desert* (c 1908) Quoted by King George VI in his Christmas broadcast 1939
- 12 Wild Goose Worship Group, *A Wee Worship Book* (Iona Community)
- 13 John C Sharp and John Wilson, *Life is for everyone* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press 1988)
- 14 © Betty Ewart, President (1987) , the St Marnock's Branch of the Woman's Guild, Kilmarnock

Resources

The following list of resources and reference works is by no means exhaustive, but is offered to help you begin to discover the wide range of material available, both in general and specialist bookshops and also at local libraries.

Key:

- P = Prayer
 M = Meditation
 L = Liturgy
 D = Drama

- Adam, David, Various titles (London: SPCK/Triangle)
- Askew, Eddie, Various titles (Leprosy Mission International)
- Bell, John, *He was in the world* (Wild Goose) P,L,M
- Bell, John and Graham Maule, *Wild Goose Prints* (Iona Community)
- Cassidy, Sheila, *Good Friday People* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd 1991)
- Clark, Lisa and Donald Macaskill, *Rediscovering Faith* (Parish Education Publications)
- Cotter, Jim, *Prayer at Night* (Cairns Publications) P,L
- Foster, Richard, *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1989)
- Fraser, Iain M, *Strange Fire* (Wild Goose) M
- Galloway, Kathy (Ed) *The Pattern of our days* (Wild Goose) L
- Harris, Paul (ed) *The Fire of Silence and Stillness* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd) M,P
- Hilton, Donald, *Liturgy of Life* (NCEC) P,M
- Huggett, Joy, Various titles
- Hughes, Gerald W., *God of Surprises* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985)
- Hughes, Gerald W., *Oh God, Why?* 2nd Edition (Oxford: Bibles Reading Fellowship 1996)
- Julian of Norwich, *Enfolded in Love: Daily Readings*, ed Robert Llewelyn
 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1980)
- Kennedy, Stanislaus (ed) *Spiritual Journeys* (Veritas) M
- Mello, Anthony de, *One Minute Wisdom* (USA: Doubleday Image 1985)
- Morley, Janet (ed) *Bread of Tomorrow: Praying with the World's Poor* (SPCK/CA 1992) P
- Netherbow Arts Centre, *Bethlehem and Beyond* (4 plays) D
- Peterson, Eugene H, *The Message* (Colorado: Navpress)
- Picard, Jan Sutch (ed), *Dandelions and Thistles* (Wild Goose) M,D
- Quoist, Michel, *Pathways of Prayer* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan 1990) P
- Saint Hilda Community, *Women Included* (SPCK) P,L
- Sherrard, Mary (ed), *Women of Faith* (Edinburgh Saint Andrew Press, 1993)
- Steven, Campbell R., (ed) *An Anthology of Hope* (Jamieson and Munro 1988)
- Stuart, Jamie, *A Glasgow Bible* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press)
- Topping, Frank, various titles (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press)
- Wild Goose, *From the Cloth to the Cradle* (Wild Goose) P,M,L,D
- Wild Goose Worship Group, *A Wee Worship Book* (Iona Community)
- Woolley, John A., *I am with you* (Berkhamsted: Arthur James, 1996)

Reference

Bible Society, The, *GNB Topical Concordance*
Goodrick and Kohlenberger, *NIV Handy Concordance*
Nelson's Quick Reference, *Bible People and Places*
Oxford Bible Reader's, *Dictionary and Concordance*
Wright, Chris, *User's Guide to the Bible*

Church Hymnary, 3rd Edn (Oxford University Press)
Common Ground (Saint Andrew Press)
Junior Praise (London: Marshall Pickering)
Mission Praise (London: Marshall Pickering)
Songs of Fellowship (Eastbourne: Kingsway)
Songs of God's People (Oxford University Press)