

Church of Scotland HIV Programme

“Souper Sunday 2024” - elder-led service.

Service theme: “Challenging stigma with justice and love.”

This elder-led (or others who lead worship) act of worship may be used on any Sunday of the year. The order of service is offered as a guide to how worship might be led in your Souper Sunday celebrations. Please feel free to adapt it to your own local situation, or to use it in its entirety.

Preparations:

- Recruit elders (or others) to lead worship, including the reader
- Order Gift Aid declaration envelopes* for lunch attenders by emailing nskinner@churchofscotland.org.uk.
- Prepare a very simple soup and bread lunch for after the service.
- All hymns noted here are taken from the Church Hymnary (fourth edition), although other hymns may be substituted.
- The reading printed in this order of service are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. (You may wish to use your own version.)

Order of Service

- Offering either taken at door on entry, or placed within service at your chosen point.
- The people leading the service enter and sit in the chancel or close by.

Worship leader: Good morning! May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. (Worship leader gives welcome and intimations, ending with:)

...Today, our service is a special act of worship led by elders and members of our congregation, as we celebrate “Souper Sunday”. Since 2010 the Church of Scotland has asked congregations to mark Souper Sunday with a special service on the theme of HIV. This year, we will be considering the issue of stigma. Throughout this service we will be looking at ways we can play our part as individual Christians and as the Church together, bringing hope to our world and its many people through prayer and action.

At the close of our service, everyone (whether church member or visitor here today) is warmly invited to share in a simple lunch of soup and bread. This will

take place in (INSERT NAME OF LUNCH VENUE HERE). There will also be an opportunity to make a donation to benefit the vital work of the Church of Scotland HIV Programme at the door on the way out or at lunch.

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

[A FEW SECONDS OF SILENCE]

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (Romans 12:3)

Let us worship God, singing to his praise

Hymn CH4 213: Every new morning
[ALL SING]

Speaker A:

Please be seated.

Let us pray:

God of all the earth,

We come here today to worship you together, in a place which means so much to us:

a place of praise and prayer;

a place of joy and affirmation;

a place of memory and reflection;

a place where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is read and preached and lived.

We thank you for all the many blessings which are ours in being part of Christ’s worldwide Church:

the blessing of your presence among the people;

the blessing of togetherness, in good times and in bad;

the blessing of affirmation as we search our faith and find it to be true.

In this, our church, we learn what community means, as by your grace we build not just in bricks and in mortar, in stone and in wood, but also in flesh and bone, in thought and feeling.

For all these precious, priceless gifts of your bestowing we give you thanks and praise this day!

And yet, we know that there are times when our sense of belonging can become a thing of selfishness, as we enjoy finding a sense of church-family which can be inward-looking, when it should be all-embracing. At such points in our worship

and our mission, grant us a clear vision of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: the Good News which proclaims that all are loved, no matter where they come from, no matter what their story might be.

Speaker B:

Forgive us, Lord, for excluding others when we should embrace our brothers and sisters; for revelling in our comfort when we know you call us to new horizons of faith and of mission.

Forgive us for all the many times we make our excuses or doubt the gifts of your Holy Spirit.

Forgive us for that complacency which so easily rules our hearts, so overruling our faith.

Forgive us, Lord, we pray.

[Moment of silence]

Hear these words of challenge and of comfort: “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Thanks be to God!

And now let us join in the words of the prayer which Jesus taught, saying:

[The Lord’s Prayer in the form is most familiar to the congregation]

All:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, on earth as it
is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily
bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into
temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

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

AMEN.



Worship leader (or reader):

Our reading today is taken from the New Testament and the Gospel of Luke Chapter 17, verses 11-19.

Reading: Luke 17:11-19. (reader)

Jesus Heals Ten Men With Leprosy

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” **Amen.**

Speaker A

Thank you [INSERT READER’S NAME] for our reading. Now let us sing again to God’s praise.

**Hymn CH4 351: Jesus’ hands were kind hands
[ALL SING]**

Worship leader (or reader): Boys and girls, stories are very powerful things, helping us to understand our world in really useful ways.

Let’s hear two stories from partner organisations supported by the Church of Scotland HIV Programme where our funding has helped to create understanding and overcome the kind of fear we call “stigma”.

Speaker A

Let us hear from Ramita:

I am Ramita Dhama, a 33-year-old farmer, living in Nepal with my husband and two children. Despite our efforts on the farm, the produce is insufficient for the entire year, prompting my husband to work as a labourer in India to support our family.

This was 10 years ago, but he fell seriously ill, diagnosed with tuberculosis. Tragically, he passed away due to his deteriorating health. I remarried, and we were happy until I discovered during my pregnancy that I had HIV. Under the

guidance of health workers, I gave birth to my daughter. Two years later, I became pregnant again and gave birth to my son.

Neither my husband nor my two children have HIV. However, I continue to take medication and have routine checkups. Fearful of social discrimination, I kept my condition private for many years, a sentiment echoed by others living with HIV in our community. Though challenging due to geographical constraints, I persevered with regular checkups, requiring a costly three-day journey to the district hospital. Then I learned about an organisation called United Mission to Nepal (UMN) and I visited their field office to participate in an HIV and AIDS orientation/training, gaining confidence to disclose my condition to relevant organisations. They provided me with four female goats for income generation, two of which were expecting baby goats. Prior to that, I had five more goats, so I currently have 10 goats.

My goal is to expand the goat farming venture to increase income so that I can afford to send my two children to school and for health treatment. UMN has helped me with the cost of my treatment and support and provided educational materials for my children, fostering confidence and happiness in our lives. I am deeply grateful to UMN for their unwavering love, care, and support.

Speaker B:

Let us hear from Lucy:

I am Lucy, a 46-year-old female from Edinburgh and I am living with HIV. I was referred to Positive Help by the Western General Hospital when I was finding it difficult to attend my appointments. I was really fearful of anyone knowing my HIV status. I have been let down in the past by people with confidentiality, and it was really important to me that I could count on confidentiality from the Positive Help Volunteer drivers. I was matched with one of the most experienced and sensitive volunteers. On our first meeting, the driver and I met in the car to keep things as low-key as possible. This was important because I needed to build trust as I explained my situation. I live with my partner and daughter, I recently had lost my job and money was short, my partner is unable to work due to a previous accident, and my daughter has struggled to engage with school since lockdown, which gave me a lot of worry. I now regularly get lifts to access my HIV treatment and attend meetings. I feel reassured and comfortable on the journey. Positive Help are also supporting me by finding my daughter a Study Buddy to help her catch up with school work. The empathetic and caring support I have received from Positive Help has helped me with my confidence in the whole of my life.

Hymn CH4 657: Father most loving, listen to your children
[ALL SING]

Sermon / message

Worship leader:

Do you know the date of World AIDS Day? Isn't that a thing of the past? A thing of the 1980s? Do you remember the tombstone advert and the news that Edinburgh was the AIDS capital of Europe? The kind of topic that folks in churches really don't need to worry about any more? Well, no ... because while the issues of HIV and AIDS are pretty clear in many people's minds, for an awful lot of people (young people among them) the "human immunodeficiency virus" (HIV) and the related "acquired immune deficiency syndrome" (AIDS) sadly remain threats that are real.

In a world of misunderstanding and cruelty, HIV and AIDS still find a strong and troubling connection to the horrors of stigma. The World Council of Churches, following the lead of UNAIDS, have made tackling stigma the most important issue on the agenda of their work with HIV and AIDS. Stigma prevents people from accessing testing, getting treatment and support at an early stage. Stigma loses people jobs and has a huge psychological impact on individuals, families and communities.

Our Bible story today shows us Jesus dealing with and overcoming a similar kind of health-related issue - that of leprosy. In those days to be branded a "leper" was to know stigma of the very worst sort, up close and at first hand. If you suffered from this disease you would know declining health and increasing disfigurement. It was the kind of condition which you could neither break free of nor easily conceal from public gaze. A diagnosis of leprosy meant that you would be branded as "unclean", therefore fenced off from "acceptable", "respectable" society. More than this, because it was a contagious disease (though, in truth, not actually an easy disease to contract) a person living with leprosy would be viewed by neighbours as literally "untouchable" ... just walk apart, ring your bell, keep your distance, because what you have none of the rest of us want to share in, thank you very much.

Was leprosy some sort of curse sent by God upon those whom he hated, or upon those whose sins were buried deep behind the ugly mask of their flaking skin? Surely there had to be some meaning here, even if that meaning would end up being one that no right-living community would ever wish to contemplate.

And so in the days of Jesus of Nazareth - just as today - stigma would ruin lives and force people apart at the very time when nearness and decency and plain old-fashioned love were exactly what was needed. In those days - just as today - common prejudice (like a little voice whispering inside your head) would say: "Move out. Make no eye contact. Don't offer any kind of hope, because you'll only get drawn in. There is a threat here, and a threat to you as an individual, which means that the person in front of you is - right now! - threatening you. Don't ask questions, because you mustn't be seen to be showing an interest. Simply stay ignorant because, really and truly, ignorance is bliss."

Which parts of what I have just said about leprosy and stigma 2000 years ago could also be applied in precisely the same way to the public view of HIV at any stage over the last 40 years, right down to the present day? The answer has to be: most of it.

A question: if you knew you were about to meet with someone who was living with HIV, would you be willing to shake hands with them? If the answer to that were to be no, you might ask yourself, "Why not?". And that's a good question to ask because "Why not?" starts to challenge both the inherited stigma which is alive in our society, and (more importantly) it begins to challenge us ... our assumptions ... our fears ... our unspoken sense of concern for our own personal safety.

And so we ask ourselves, "Why not? Why shouldn't we shake hands with someone living with HIV?" Perhaps we decide to take a big step forward. We go on to the Terrence Higgins Trust website, a place of real expertise in the fields of HIV and AIDS. And there we find this message:

HIV cannot be passed on by:

kissing

hugging

shaking hands

sharing space with someone

sharing a toilet

sharing household items such as cups, plates, cutlery, or bed linen

any other general social contact.

These are simple everyday activities. Can you imagine if you were the recipient and people were reluctant to shake your hand? Or how would you would if you never got a hug because they knew you were HIV positive?

How would you feel ... particularly when HIV is not ever going to be passed on by hugging or shaking hands???

Are you surprised to learn that the Rugby Football Union is fully supportive of HIV+ rugby players? Indeed, did you know that one of the loudest voices in HIV advocacy belongs to Welsh rugby legend, Gareth Thomas, who himself lives with the virus? Just by trying our best to find out more, we can start to crack the wall of stigma. And the more knowledgeable and understanding we become, the weaker will be that wall until it can no longer support any more ignorance or prejudice.

Jesus, as we see in our story from Luke's gospel, was someone who throughout his world-changing ministry built bridges, not walls. And those bridges would lead to new beginnings, new meaning, a new kind of home for those previously left out in the cold. This "bridge-building Jesus" would take people across from despair to hope, and he would do it with healing touch and personal connection.

If Jesus saw a leper, he didn't shy away ... he came close. If there were people who were different or vulnerable or marginalised in some way, he didn't see a threat ... he saw a person - a person with vulnerabilities and needs just like the rest of us have to one extent or another. Jesus' love was clearly very special because the love which he channelled was first and foremost shared with people who had deep and pressing needs - the type of needs which might so readily scare others away.

What can you do to show your concern and practical care for those people in your neighbourhood who may be all but invisible to passers-by ... to neighbours ... to you? If our Christian faith means anything, we should be open to the challenge of Jesus to reach out in friendship to anyone - girl, boy, woman or man - whose life is less than it should be on account of being "counted out" by stigma. Amen.

Now let us continue our worship by singing

Hymn CH4 623: Here in this place new light was shining
[ALL SING]

Speaker A:

Today our Intercessory Prayer and prayer of commitment are adapted from the 2021 World AIDS Day service of the World Council of Churches.

Let us pray:

God of love and justice, help us to open our hearts and minds, so that together we will work towards ending the stigma and discrimination that people living with HIV continue to experience in society and in accessing services.

May we be instruments of your compassion and accompaniment to those who are particularly vulnerable to HIV because of the use of drugs, sexual practices or being imprisoned, because they are on the move due to war and violence or because they lack adequate access to services and experience violation of their dignity and rights.

We pray that faith communities embrace and accompany all people with the unconditional love and justice of Christ.

Speaker B:

Let us stand firm, waiting on the Lord; alert and awake. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon us to bring good news to the oppressed, to lead by example, adorning a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

Today we commit ourselves to ensuring that the 12 million children, young people, women and men living with HIV who are yet to receive antiretroviral treatment, will get the care, treatment and services that they are deprived of.

We commit ourselves to healing and caring for the sick and broken-hearted people, bearing one another's burdens, fulfilling the teachings of Jesus.

We commit ourselves to ensuring that love and justice can flow unhindered to overcome inequalities.

We commit ourselves to acknowledging you and serving you, Lord, in "the other", seeing you in the neediest and most vulnerable of our world.

These our prayers we offer in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Worship leader:

Thank you to everyone who has played their part in our Souper Sunday service today. I would like to remind you that after the benediction all are warmly invited to stay on for a simple lunch of soup and bread, and a chance to chat together.

And now we close our time of worship by singing

Hymn CH4 359 He came down that we may have love

[ALL SING]

Worship leader:

Go out into the world reaching out to all who need God's love today.

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

AMEN.