

"Being Disciples Today!"
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Dear Friends,

The theme for this Local Arrangement Service, 'Being Disciples Today!' came out the Sheffield Methodist District's initiative for 2016/17 - 'Developing a positive culture for discipleship through learning, changing and joining in'.

There are a number of places in the service where you could 'customize' your service to your own congregation. The 'House Group Experience' could be replaced by a description of the experience of a bible study/discussion group or course in your own church. The Quiet Time thinking about change could become a reflection on how church has changed from a member of your congregation - preferably with a positive element!! The account of the work of the 'Freedom' project in Bolsover could be replaced by an account of work done in your community.

The hymns are only suggestions - if your congregation knows others that fit in with the theme, especially any newer ones, please use those. This is *your* service of worship to God.

I have suggested that you use 2 leaders and 4 readers, but please feel free to adjust that, too!

Chris Odell (Sheasby)

“Being Disciples Today!”

Call to Worship: Leader 1

God has invited us all here this morning,
to worship him and celebrate his love.

He says to each one of us, ‘Come to the all-wise Teacher,
that you may learn of the things that last, of the truth for your lives.’

HYMN – God is here! As we his people.... *StF 25; H&P 653*

Introduction to the theme of the service: Leader 1

In this service we will be basing our worship and reflection on the of the growing of discipleship through ‘learning’, ‘changing’ and ‘joining in’ with what God is doing in our churches and communities.

As followers of Jesus, we should always be learning about God, always be changing, maturing, responding in love and always be looking for new ways of serving him in the present age.

Prayer of Adoration: Leader 2

In this prayer there is a response: God of Love: **We adore you.** Let us pray...

Love spoke at Creation, calling life into being.

Love spoke, and everything came from nothing.

Love speaks to us, saying, ‘Love Me, and you will learn of the love at the heart of the universe.’

God of Love: **We adore you.**

Love spoke in Jesus, teaching in parables and words of hope and healing.

Love spoke forgiveness to the condemned and despised.

Love speaks to us, saying ‘Love Me, and you will learn of the saving love that gifts real life.’

God of Love: **We adore you.**

Love spoke through the fiery words of the Spirit that all could understand.

Love spoke good news to the lost and the loveless.

Love speaks to us, saying ‘Love Me, and you will learn that I live within your heart.’

God of Love: **We adore you.**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we love and adore you. **Amen.**

‘Learning as disciples’: Leader 1

The word ‘disciple’ comes from a Latin word meaning ‘to learn’. The first disciples called Jesus ‘Teacher’. They followed him because they were hungry to learn more about God – and this was what Jesus taught them, directly, in parables, and by example. As 21st century disciples, we need to be hungry to learn more of the God we meet in Jesus, in the Old Testament and in our daily lives. A modern saying is that we should ‘learn one new thing every day’. Christians who read the Bible regularly are often heard saying ‘I always get something new when I read it, even from the old familiar stories.’ As the world and our lives change around us, learning more of our faith helps us to understand what God has to say to us in the confusion! The word ‘discipline’ also comes from the same word for to learn, reminding us of the need to make sure we find time to learn of God, as did the Psalmist in the Psalm we’re now going to share...

Psalm: Psalm 119: 97-104/5 *read responsively, led by Leader 1 (could use H&P 876C)*

1: How I love your law! I think about it all day long.

2: Your commandment is with me all the time and makes me wiser than my enemies.

3: I understand more than all my teachers, because I meditate on your instructions.

4: I have greater wisdom than those who are old, because I obey your commands.

5: I have avoided all evil conduct, because I want to obey your word.

6: I have not neglected your instructions, for you yourself are my teacher.

7: How sweet is the taste of your instructions - sweeter even than honey!

8: I gain wisdom from your laws, and so I hate all bad conduct.

Leader 1: Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path.

Prayer of Confession: Leader 2 Let us pray...

Loving God, we confess to you that we are not the disciples you want us to be.

We are not diligent in our study of your Word, but seek quick and easy understandings

Of what you say to us, ignoring our hunger for a deeper knowledge of you.

We find the Bible hard to understand, but are ashamed to admit it.

Like Martha we prefer activity to the quiet contemplation of your Word to us.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to open our ears and minds to you, as well as our hearts,

So that we may be true and effective disciples of Jesus in this troubled world.

In the name of Jesus the Teacher, who brought the Good News of forgiveness and hope. **Amen.**

New Testament Reading: Reader 1 – Mark 4:1 - 9

Reflection on 'The Parable of the Sower: Readers 1, 2, 3, 4 (or a different 4 voices)

Voice 1: I heard his words. They made sense at the time. 'That is right!' I thought. 'He's got it in one!' But then a friend said 'You don't want to listen to him! He's only a working man – what does he know about the Almighty? Now, if you ask me, the real truth is...'

And my friend's words made sense, too.

Voice 2: I heard his words. He certainly convinced me. What he had to say was wonderful news! I went to his church. I joined his group. It was great! But then, well, I got this job. I had to work Sunday mornings and the family didn't want me to go out evenings.

Voice 3: I heard his words. I listened almost to the end – then I remembered I'd left the dinner on too high... and I'd left the sheets out and it was starting to look like rain.... and I needed a birthday card for Uncle... would the paper-shop still be open? I heard his words...I think.

Voice 4: I heard his words. And I heard him, too. And in him, I found God.

'A shared experience' – experiences of a new Bible Study House Group: Reader 2

When I first set up a Bible Study house group at our church, a number of people expressed an interest in attending, but some responded negatively to the invitation – 'I can't come. It's a Monday and that's when I do my washing' – and some responded with anxiety – 'I'd like to come, but I'm worried I'll be out of my depth. I don't know anything about the Bible – I didn't go to Sunday School, you see.' I reassured the second lady that she wouldn't be alone in her anxiety and pointed out that this could be her opportunity to learn more about the scriptures that shape our beliefs and guide our way of life!

The day for the first meeting arrived. After a warm welcome and fortified by prayer, tea and biscuits, we began. 'Don't be worried if you feel you don't know much about the Bible', I said, 'most of us feel like that. And those who know more will tell you that the more you know, the more you realise you don't know. We are going on a journey of discovery together.' I stressed that we needed to learn to listen to each other and to give everyone a chance to share their thoughts, without putting pressure to join in on those who just wanted to listen, to start with.

We studied in all kinds of different ways. Sometimes we followed courses and books. Sometimes we took turns in leading meetings on Bible passages that meant a lot to us. We grew in both knowledge and confidence. Our meetings stimulated our thinking about God in our lives, and challenged us to new ways of understanding and serving him. A couple went to live and work in a disadvantaged area after a study course on how God calls us to 'go against the flow' of our modern society's priorities and values.

I prayed that the Holy Spirit was at work in my house group, and believed that was so, because of the fellowship, support, learning and fun that came from it. I hope the others felt the same. I only know that 25 years after my moving on from that church, the house group was still going!

HYMN: Come, all who look to Christ today... *StF 678; H&P 765 (Tune Tallis's Canon)*

'Changing as disciples': Leader 1

We often lament the changes in our world and society. We may feel, like the Israelites in Babylon in our next reading, that we live in a strange land. Change unsettles us, confuses us, and challenges us. Yet without change in society, in our church, in our knowledge, and without change and growth to maturity in our discipleship, we will stagnate, wither or even die.

Old Testament Reading: Reader 2 Psalm 137:1 - 6 – 'A Lament of Israelites in Exile.'

Quiet thinking time: Leader 2 (or a reflection from a worshipper on the change in church that they have experienced [especially positive])

We're going to spend a few moments in quiet reflection now, thinking about all the changes we have seen in our life-times...changes in the world; changes in the things we do day-to-day; changes in attitudes and morality; and, most of all, changes in our Church. Some of these changes we regret, others have proved helpful and good. Spend some time thinking about the positive changes in the church and its working these days. **2 – 3 MINUTES SILENCE**

Let us pray:

Lord, we want to thank you for your constant love for us amidst all the change we experience. Help us to see where you are in the change and to change and grow alongside you. **Amen.**

Gospel Readings - 'Christ's New Way': Reader 3 – Matthew 9: 9 – 16

Offering and Offering Prayer: Leader 2

Lord, the value of this money has changed

But the value of your love for us has not.

Take this money and use it, take us and use us

To give added value to the lives of the needy of your world. **Amen.**

HYMN: Lord, for the years... *StF 470; MP 428; MP 428.*

'Joining in as disciples': Leader 1

Do you remember that old poster 'Jesus the Carpenter seeks joiners!?' Joining things isn't as popular in our society today as it once was, but the essence of being a disciple is 'joining in'. Joining in worship, service and witness with those who belong to this church... 'joining in' with the wider Connexion, with other Christians and people of faith... 'joining in' with the glorious band of 'good-doers' that every community produces... and most importantly of all, joining in with God in his caring for troubled humankind.

Listen now to a reading from Acts that shows how the Apostle Paul 'joined in'...

Readings from the Acts of the Apostles: Reader 4 - from Acts 16:9-15 altered

One night Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" As soon as Paul had this vision, we got ready to leave for Macedonia, because we decided that God had called us to preach the Good News to the people there... (on landing) we went inland to Philippi, a city of the first district of Macedonia; it is also a Roman colony. We spent several days there.

On the Sabbath we went out of the city to the riverside, where we thought there would be a place where Jews gathered for prayer. We sat down and talked to the women who gathered there. One of those who heard us was Lydia from Thyatira, who was a dealer in purple cloth. She was a woman who worshipped God, and the Lord opened her mind to pay attention to what Paul was saying. After she and the people of her house had been baptized, she invited us, "Come and stay in my house if you have decided that I am a true believer in the Lord." And she persuaded us to go.

Reading: Readers 1, 2 & 3– a Story from Bolsover (or, preferably, find your own local story)

Reader 1: Bolsover Methodist Church's "Freedom Community Project" is now working on six sites and is an example of a church working in simple and yet effective and life-changing ways with the most vulnerable in our society. Methodists are often thought of being slow to respond and hostile to change. But here Methodists and others are engaged in community mission and ministry in a way that is flexible and responsive, which seizes opportunities, and is passionate about being alongside the most vulnerable. Listen to the stories of two such people that the "Freedom Community Project" has helped: *(the names have been changed)*

Reader 2: 'I am Martin. My marriage fell apart and I fell into a downward spiral of alcoholism and debt, ending up homeless. The Project listened to my story, upheld me at my lowest, helped me sort out my debt and got me into a rehab programme.'

Reader 3: 'I am Angela. I am in my early twenties and had been living rough and couch surfing since the age of 14. Normality for me was living in a tent in a friend's back garden. I shared my story with a support worker at one of the Freedom "free" cafe mornings. I was given a different vision of what my life could be and supported in getting benefits and housing.'

HYMN: There's a Spirit in the air... *StF 398; H&P 326*

Prayers of Intercession and The Lord's Prayer: Leader 1 (*you can add in local needs.)
sung Taize response (MP 908) OR In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Let us, as eager disciples, approach our loving God in prayer. Let us pray...

God our Teacher, as your disciples we pray that we may see you more clearly,

Love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day.

Help us to lay open both our hearts and our minds to you, in study, prayer and sharing,

That the open secret of your undying love for all humankind

Might shine through all that we are now and all that we shall be.

'O Lord hear our prayer....' OR In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

God our Guide, as your disciples we pray that we may seek the support and challenge of your love on our life journey through this rapidly changing society and world.

Help us let go of all that holds us back from following you trustfully into an unknown future.

We pray for the unknown future of the world, of the church, of those who suffer, of our own lives*, placing it into your steady, loving hands, as we commit ourselves in discipleship to you.

'O Lord hear our prayer....' OR In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

God, Head of our Family, as your disciples we pray that we may live and work in unity,

Bound together by the cords of your elastic and indestructible love.

Help us to search for and discover where your Holy Spirit is at work

In the wider world, in our communities and neighbourhoods, in times of joy and times of pain.

May we work with you, alongside all through whom your Spirit is acting,

to build your kingdom of love and justice, peace and joy here on earth.

'O Lord hear our prayer....' OR In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer:

HYMN: *Either Sent by the Lord am I...StF 239.*

Or Lord, Thy Church on earth is seeking...StF 410; H&P 774.

Blessing: Leader 2

Let us go out into the world as Christ's disciples, made strong by faith and love,

Always learning more of God and his will for us,

Always ready to meet change with hope for the future,

Always ready to join in, together, with the work God calls us to do. And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest and remain upon each one of us, now and evermore. **Amen.**