

An outdoor service of worship for Harvest

Guidance notes



Joining a local women's group has transformed Janet Ben's life. She uses her new income to feed and educate her children.

Autumn is often a time when we bring the outside into church buildings. My childhood memories of Harvest services in rural Northern Ireland are of the smell of fruit and flowers as you entered the sanctuary and of the rustle of the barley stalks attached to the end of our pew. It was a delightful multisensory experience.

This Harvest, we take church outdoors instead. This suggested Open Air Service is planned so that it can be used in any outdoor space, whether in the grounds of the church building if you have such a space available, or in a nearby green space, following the guidelines for that area. The guidance provided here is for those leading the gathering.

Prior to the gathering, send out information to help participants prepare for the forecast weather. Waterproofs, warm layers and sturdy shoes are recommended. Please encourage people to bring a flask of coffee, hot chocolate or tea and their own cups, or provide these from your church if coronavirus guidelines allow. They may also like to bring a picnic blanket or something to sit on.



Janet (right) and her friends have joined together and set up a fruit juice business.

Agree on a regathering sound before you begin. You might want to use a musical instrument, such as a bell or a chime, to bring everyone back together at the end of the short wandering activities.

You could also set this activity up as a pilgrimage in the grounds of your church, if you have them. You could adapt the words into stations, using weatherproof displays, for individuals to engage with throughout the week, with appropriate hand sanitising facilities set up at points of contact in your grounds, such as gates.

Do adapt the language and activities to be inclusive of the requirements of your group. For example, where we have written 'walk', you might wish to say 'journey' if that is more appropriate, etc.

When gathering, please follow any current coronavirus restrictions.

Find more prayer resources and ways to donate to the Harvest appeal at caid.ie/harvest

Introduction to the Open Air Service

This Open Air Service is inspired by the Christian Aid Harvest Appeal. This year, the Harvest Appeal focuses on Malawi. Perhaps just imagining Malawi, in east Africa, will help us feel warmer.

We'll come to that story a bit later in our gathering, when we have our hot drinks together.

How do we know it is autumn? Weather patterns are often a key sign in how we define the changing seasons and of how we know that we are now in autumn.

Take a short walk in silence, on your own or in the group you are with. As you walk, reflect on these questions: How do you know it is autumn? What signs tell you that autumn has arrived? Gather back here in five minutes. Allow people time to reflect on this as they walk and perhaps discuss this quietly with their walking companions.

Reading

Have someone prepared to read Psalm 19:1-6. This will be best from a mobile device rather than paper, since it will be less vulnerable to the breeze.

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

Can you imagine where the Psalmist might have been looking to have written this Psalm? Perhaps he had been gazing at the night sky from a cave, revelling in the awe and wonder at the movement of the clouds, or being amazed by the changes in the position of the sun in the sky through the year.

Take a moment to look up at the clouds, the sky and sun (if you can see them), and listen to this reading again.

Have the reader read the passage again slowly.

What is this voice that goes out through all the earth saying? What are these words that go to the end of the world?

Take a moment in silence to listen.

The seasons themselves give reason to pause and praise God the Creator.

Prayer

Take a moment in silent prayer. Give God thanks for autumn and whatever you most enjoy about this season.

Psalm 150:6 says: 'Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!'

Think about everything that is breathing nearby. Trees, greenery, birds, insects or animals.

We are grateful for every breath that we have.

Conscious that the coronavirus pandemic has reminded us of how every breath is vulnerable.

In 2020 we were made aware of the poignant final words of George Floyd: 'I can't breathe'. Powerful and heartbreaking words exposing systemic and endemic racism.

Our breath connects us with every living thing and to everyone alive and who has lived.

We all breathe the same air.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

Let's pause to breathe in prayer our praise and petition to God.

Invite participants to stand and to take a breath in and out through their nose. They may find it helpful to close their eyes as they stand rooted to the spot.



Janet and her friend Ida enjoy the companionship and teamwork of making baobab juice together.

Saying the words slowly, guide the group through this prayer:

Breathing in fresh air
 Breathing out frustration
 Breathing in God's love
 Breathing out fear
 Breathing in the joy of Christ
 Breathing out stress and strain
 Breathing in the power of the Spirit.
 Breath of God in us
 Renewing and restoring us
 Transforming and empowering us
 To be the people of God
 In this time, for Your world.
 Amen.

Hot drinks and stories

If possible, move to a spot where everyone can sit together – perhaps on logs or rocks, or picnic blankets they have brought along. Or remain standing if that isn't possible. Invite everyone to pour their hot beverage. Before they take a sip, ask them to watch the steam from the cup. The warm air from the hot drink quickly cools and condenses in the cool air. Often it's the change in the air temperature that tells us when autumn has arrived.

We often share tea or coffee together. Perhaps with our family after a day at work, around the kitchen table with our friends, or with our church after a service. Sharing food and drink can be a beautiful symbol of community.

As you sip your drink, let's reflect on how communities in Malawi are uniting against climate change with another, unusual, drink – baobab juice.

The climate crisis is tearing apart lives across Malawi. The resourceful women who form the Makande women's group saw their homes destroyed and their crops and livestock washed away in Cyclone Idai, leaving them with little or no shelter, no source of income and no food. Some of them lost everything they owned.

They have not let that stop them. They are standing together, united, and are working to change their lives.

Together, they have set up a baobab juice business, making and selling juice from the baobab tree to rebuild their lives and support their families. Supported by Christian Aid's partner, Eagles Relief and Development, the women were given training in business basics and making baobab juice, along with a low interest loan. They make up to 6,000 bottles of juice a month, with the women working in shifts.

Now take a look at Creation around us. For the Makande women's group, the baobab trees have become a source of joy and hope. Janet, one of the members of the group said: 'My business is doing well and I have managed to save with the village bank. My two elder kids can now go to school on a full stomach. The vision I have for my family is that we should no longer be poor. I want us to be a family that will inspire others.'

The Makande women know they are stronger when they stand together. How can our community stand together for our sisters and brothers throughout the world in the face of climate crisis?

Take time to enjoy your hot drink. As you warm your hands around your cup, reflect on the hands that have reached out to help each other across the world this year. Give thanks to God for the goodness of humanity working to bring heaven to Earth.

Closing prayer

Let us say quietly together the words Jesus taught us as our closing prayer, the words that are known and said by communities united around the world.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever.
Amen.

Fellowship

Spend time together in fellowship over hot drinks and consider how you can unite with our sisters and brothers as a church community this Harvest.

Additional information

You can also download videos and resources for an indoor or online service from caid.ie/harvest

More information about the Harvest appeal and the baobab tree can be found here: caid.ie/harvest

Read *Song of the prophets: A global theology of climate change* – Christian Aid's report updated in 2020. caid.ie/song-prophets-report

Find out more about how you can take action for climate justice: caid.ie/climate

Take a church collection to support our sisters around the world. Order collection envelopes at caid.ie/harvest or set up a digital collection at:

Northern Ireland:
justgiving.com/campaign/Harvest2021NIR

Republic of Ireland:
justgiving.com/campaign/Harvest2021ROI

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