

Harvest service – enriched with active thanks

This suggested order for a harvest service provides prayers, readings, full sermon notes and an opportunity for reflection. It also suggests ways to make your service more interactive by using some of the other activities from the *Enriching Harvest* pack. There is an alternative all-age talk available from www.mrdf.org.uk/harvest or on the *Enriching Harvest* CD-ROM.

Please feel free to pick and choose elements and adapt this to your setting.

On the CD-ROM and website you will find a PowerPoint presentation of all the words to the prayers, as well as some blank template slides. The full text of the service is also available in a Microsoft Word document, should you wish to create printed service sheets.

We've even made some music suggestions for you at the end.

Order of service

Call to worship

Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops!
(Proverbs 3:9)

Hymn or song

Welcome

Welcome to this service where we will thank God for the harvest – for crops and food and all the people who work to bring them to us.

We are also going to be learning about some very special first fruits in India, as we support the Methodist Relief and Development Fund and its work to enable people in the world's poorest communities to enrich their harvests.

Prayer of praise

The Lord made the heaven, earth and sea
And everything in them

Praise the Lord:

Let all that I am praise you, Lord!

The Lord gives food to the hungry
And justice to the oppressed

Praise the Lord:

Let all that I am praise you, Lord!

The Lord made me as he desired
And equipped me to do his work

Praise the Lord:

Let all that I am praise you, Lord!

Interactive idea
You might like to use
the quiz or the game
Squirmy wormy! at
this point.

Prayer of confession

Loving God

We come to you to confess those moments
when we have forgotten that this world is yours
and that we are yours too:

the times when we have kept the wealth and talents you have given us to ourselves

the times when we have exploited your creation

the times when we have failed to honour you

in our thoughts, words and actions.

We are sorry

and ask your forgiveness.

Have mercy on us.

Lead us back to what you would have us be

so we can serve you again

and grow your kingdom.

In Jesus' name

Amen

Hear these words of grace: The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103: 8,10,12)

Hymn or song

Reading

Matthew 25:14-29 (the parable of the talents)

The Message translation of this passage is particularly effective.

Sermon

I want to tell you about a man from India called Gangi. He had a small piece of land, but it was dry and choked with thick, scrubby bushes. The equipment needed to clear and water the land was too expensive for him. So even though he was poor and hungry, the land sat there unused.

But through a local organisation, supported by the Methodist Relief and Development Fund, Gangi and his neighbours got training in low-cost farming techniques and learned how to work as a co-operative to make the most of what they did have. They also received some small start up loans.

Gangi and his neighbours pooled their land and loans – enabling them to create a sizeable, irrigated plot. They used the enterprising and creative methods they had learned, such as:

- making sure they pulled up all the weeds to conserve water for the banana plants and provide animal fodder they could sell
- composting any bananas that split to make fertiliser
- using the space between the trees to grow seedlings for sale.

You may prefer to use the all-age talk featured in the Fun for all ages section; visit www.mrdf.org.uk/harvest or look on the CD-ROM.

This group squeezed every drop from the modest resources they had – and were able to grow their own fruit on their own land. Now they run a profitable banana plantation, producing fruit of the highest quality that sells for good prices.

When MRDF visited the plantation, Gangi said: 'See the other [wasted] land over there? This land was like that before, look now! We are getting livelihoods from this land and food for our families. For this we are thankful to you.'

First fruits

There is something special about first fruits. If you have a garden or vegetable patch of your own you'll know how exciting it is when you pick your first tomato or strawberry.

Back in Old Testament times, when most people grew at least some of what they ate themselves, God gave the people of Israel a command that they should bring the first fruits of their harvest to him as an offering.

The quantity required for this offering was small – so it wasn't for any practical use – it was symbolic. The offering of the special first fruit was a mark of reverence to God that said two things. Firstly it said thank you – and made honouring God the thing that they did first, before trying to meet any of their own needs – showing that they truly trusted God to provide for them. Secondly, offering first fruits also reminded the people that everything they had came from God and ultimately belonged to God.

What's planted in your life's field?

Nowadays we still celebrate Harvest to say thank you to God for our crops and produce, and for all the people who work so hard to bring food from the fields to our plates.

Very few of us work in farming – we don't have sheaves of barley or lambs to bring today. But we should still have a harvest from the good seeds God has planted in our lives.

The fields of our lives are all different – God gives us all different combinations of gifts such as time, a home, money, friends and family, education and different talents – but we can each use them to produce a harvest for God.

Growing or withering?

Earlier we heard the parable of the talents – in which a master entrusts his wealth to his servants. A talent was a lot of money – just one talent was worth many years' wages. So whether they received five, two or one talent – each servant had been entrusted with a big responsibility. The first two servants invested their master's money and grew what he had given them, making the master so happy that he invited them to share the benefits. But the third servant didn't use what he'd been given – he just hid the money in a hole.

Think about the good seeds God has planted in our lives.

They might include:

- good at organising events
- a network of business contacts
- being a sensitive listener
- a car to give people lifts in
- strength for heavy work.

Are we giving the first fruits of the harvest from these seeds to God? Or expecting him to make do with the leftovers?

MRDF can offer people opportunities to use talents. Small miracles are possible when people put their time and talents to work for fundraising events, sponsored activities, local speaking engagements and generally promoting our work.

Call 020 7467 5132 or email mrdf@methodistchurch.org.uk to find out more.

Jesus told this parable to show that God gives each of us different things, but we are all expected to use them in the best way we can. If God has planted lots of good things in the fields of our lives then we can be sure that he is expecting a harvest that will grow his kingdom.

So how can we make sure that we are like the servants who grew their talents – not like the servant who buried his?

Compared to most other people in the world, we in this country have been given a lot and that gives us a big responsibility. We have access to more money, opportunities and power than most of the world's people. For example, if you earn £12,000 a year, you are in the top 11% of richest people in the world. If you earn £24,000 a year you're in the top 2% and if you earn £48,000 that would put you in the top 0.75%.

Are we as creative and enterprising with what we have been given as the first two servants in the parable? Or Gangi from India?

Celebrate with first fruits

This harvest let's celebrate all that God has given us in three ways.

1. Look at the field of our lives, and ask God to help us see and be thankful for what he has planted there.
2. Ask God to show us how we can give him the first fruits and use these things to grow his kingdom.
3. Support the world's poorest people through MRDF so that people all over the world can grow something extraordinary and celebrate first fruits that are a small miracle – just like Gangi did.

Reflection

On the *Enriching Harvest* CD-ROM, or at www.mrdf.org.uk/harvest, is a multimedia reflection piece. This four-minute presentation uses music and imagery from India and poses questions that help worshippers reflect on what has been planted in the field of their life and how they can give the first fruits to God.

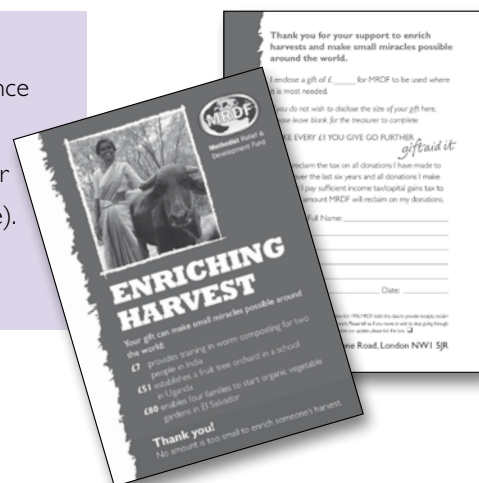
Offering

If a retiring collection will be made for MRDF's work, you might want to mention it now. You might like to introduce an offering/collection for MRDF's work with these words:

We have an opportunity, now, to invest some of our talents in the world's poorest communities. Through MRDF, we can help people to celebrate their own first fruits and enrich communities for the future.

giftaid it

Gift Aid gives 28% extra free – and that makes a big difference to the number of small miracles MRDF can make possible. Please use the gift aid envelopes provided for any offering or collection (you may want to give these out the week before). You can order more by calling 020 7467 5132 or emailing mrdf@methodistchurch.org.uk



Offertory prayer

Generous Father

Thank you for our harvest – for the plants and animals that grow on your earth, and for all the good things you have planted in our lives. We give this offering to glorify you, Lord, and pray in faith that it will grow your kingdom and enrich the harvests of others.

Amen

Hymn or song

Intercessions

Creator God, we lift to you all the people involved in growing and bringing food to us. We pray for all who farm around the world. We know farming is difficult and sometimes dangerous, so we ask that you would protect all who farm, wherever they are in the world, and give them peace as they work to feed all of our families. Lord of creation:

In your mercy, hear us.

Creator God, we know you made each one of us in your own image, unique and wonderful. And we remember now all those people who are rejected or oppressed by society. Make us sensitive to exclusion and injustice and inspire us with your holy outrage to do all we can to end it. Lord of creation:

In your mercy, hear us.

Creator God, we know that we are not just part of this church but part of your global church. We lift up to you the people doing your work around the world, especially those working with the poor and the marginalised, carrying your love and blessings to new places and situations. Lord, protect them and equip them to serve you. Lord of creation:

In your mercy, hear us.

Hymn or song

Blessing

As we go out into the world

May the blessings of our generous God rest upon us

And may we use those blessings

To grow his kingdom and enrich others

This Harvest and always.

Amen

[music suggestions follow >](#)

Music suggestions

The following are suggestions for hymns and songs you could use for your Harvest worship. They can be found in books *Songs of Fellowship* (S of F), *Hymns and Psalms* (H & P) or *Common Ground* (CG).

	S of F	H & P	CG
All creatures of our God and King	645	329	-
Come ye thankful people come	75	355	-
Fill your hearts with joy and gladness	717	-	-
For the fruits of his creation, thanks be to God	-	342	34
For your generous providing	-	-	35
I will offer up my life	851	-	-
Let everything that has breath	880	-	-
Oh the earth is the Lord's	-	-	96
Oh the life of the world	-	-	97
Praise God for the harvest	-	351	102
There is no one like our God	1036	-	-
We plough the fields and scatter	585	352	-
We wanna change this world	1104	-	-
You shall go out with joy	640	-	149

Sing a new song... the contemporary anthem *We are blessed* (*bring heaven to earth*) expresses the theme of receiving in order to then bless others. Listen to it in MP3 format and download the words and music at www.andyflan.com/organicworship (Cited with kind permission of Andy Flannagan.)