

CHURCH
URBAN
FUND ⊕

CHANGING LIVES AND
COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Growing good in every season

Reflecting and praying together throughout the year



The themes of Growing Good: Presence, Perseverance, Hospitality, Participation and Adaptability are not just found in our resources – they can be found throughout the Scriptures and in the seasons of the liturgical year.

In Advent and Christmas, the theme of God's presence amongst us

comes through in the incarnation; at the last supper Jesus shows us radical hospitality as he washes feet and breaks bread; at Pentecost we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to participate in God's mission in the world.

I hope that these resources will be a blessing to you and your communities as we journey through the liturgical year together, and celebrate the unfolding of God's salvation which is a gift for all of the world.

As you use these resources, think about how the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not only good news for you, but for the community where you live, and think about how God wants you to put your faith into action where you live

and work. I will leave you with some words, attributed to St. Teresa of Avila, as you think about Growing Good in your local area.

Christ has no body now but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Edwards'.

The Reverend Adam Edwards,
Deputy CEO, Church Urban Fund

How to use

- Each short act of worship takes around 20 mins.
- They can be led by anyone. No prior experience is required!
- They can be adapted to suit your context, whether as part of a church service, with a small group or at home.
- You can take part as a church community, home group, family or individual.
- We've provided 'IDEA!' sections that could take place before or during the service. These require some extra material and a small amount of preparation.
- Each service includes a scripture reading, a short reflection that can be read out loud, questions for discussion and intercessions.
- You can download and print the reflections here: <https://cuf.org.uk/growing-good-in-every-season>
- Liturgy where indicated* from Common Worship.
- Scripture quotations taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version.

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Christmas lights: sharing the light of Christ and a message of hope in our communities

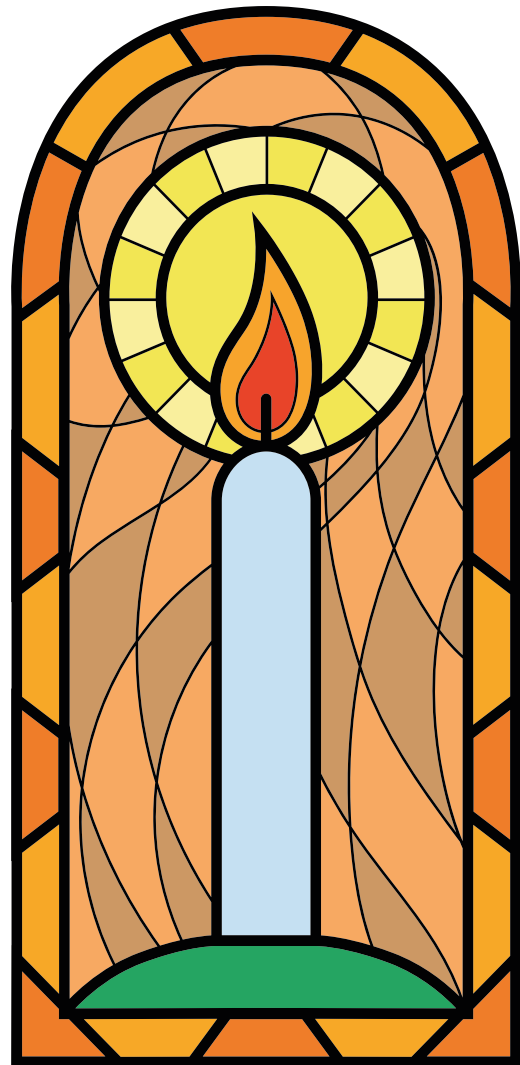
'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.' (John 1:5)

You'll need:

- One larger candle or enough candles for everyone
- Matches or lighters



Scripture Reading: John 1: 1-14



Candle lighting

At the end of the reading light a candle, or invite everyone to light their own candle. Spend a few quiet moments observing the flame. If you are using this reflection as part of a group, ask people to notice the difference that the light makes.

Reflection

We are aware of the darkness around us. The darkness of poverty, inequality, anxiety, and injustice. We are aware that right now people are struggling without light and warmth and hot food. The impact of the issues facing individuals and families in our communities seems overwhelming and we can feel lost and helpless in the darkness.

Sometimes it is easier to dwell on the darkness than search for the light, but the simple act of lighting a candle can redirect us to hope. Even a single candle transforms a room and makes a difference.

Light provides warmth and comfort. Light can guide us by highlighting danger or revealing that there is nothing to be afraid of after all. Light marks moments of celebration and joy.

In the reading from John, we are reminded to look to Jesus, the light of the world, our comforter, healer, guide. We are called to do the same for others.

When we feel overwhelmed by the darkness, we can turn to the light of Jesus that is full of grace and truth and hope for us and for our communities. And we can share this light with others through our words and actions.



Questions for reflection (as a group or for individual reflection)



- Where are you aware of darkness in your community? What are people struggling with? Where do you see poverty, suffering, fear or injustice?
- Where do you see light in your community? Who are the people, organisations and projects that are making a difference and bringing hope?
- How can you share the light of Christ this Christmas? Is there one thing you could do individually or as a group to make a difference? Can you encourage or join in with something that is already happening?

Closing Prayer*



People of God: awake!

The day is coming soon when you shall see God face to face.

Remember the ways and the works of God. God calls you out of darkness to walk in the light of his coming.

You are God's children.

RESPONSE:

Lord, make us one as we walk with Christ today and for ever.

Spend some time praying for your community - focusing on the challenges and opportunities you have identified.

IDEA!



- You will need clean jam jars, thin paper, simple stencils, scissors and glue.
- Cut a strip of paper or thin card so that it is long enough to wrap around the jar with some overlap, and tall enough to cover the height of the jar.
- Draw and then cut a shape – we suggest a star or a heart – in the strip of paper (you could provide biscuit cutters for people to use as a stencil).
- Wrap the paper around the jar fairly tightly and glue the two ends together where they overlap.
- Place an unlit tealight in the jar and ask an adult to light it carefully with a long taper or lighter.

Staying safe: Never leave a burning candle unattended. Never burn a candle on or near anything that might catch fire. Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets.

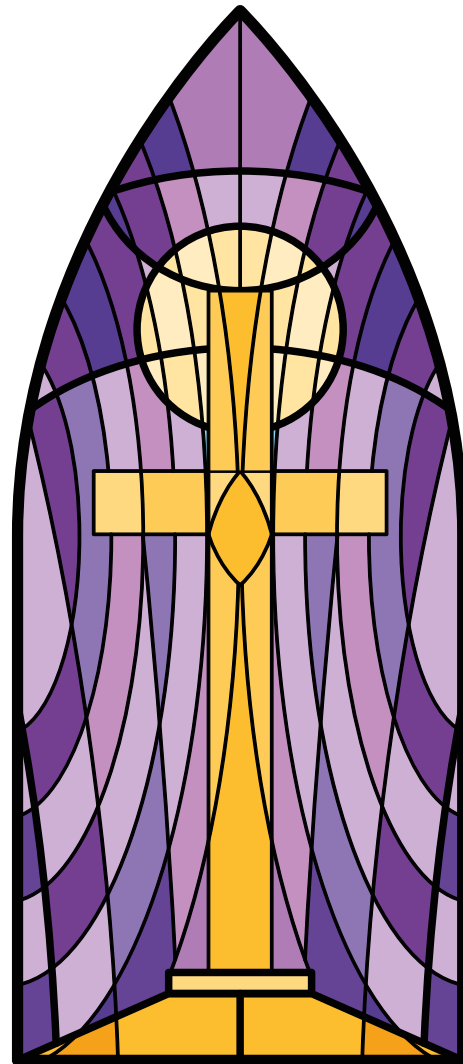


True Fasting: turning to God and loving our neighbours

'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?' (Isaiah 58: 5)

You'll need:

- Blank postcards with enough space for writing. Make your own or download our template.
- A cross, pin-board or other item to display your postcards.



Opening words

In this time of reflection we will renew our commitment to respond to the need around us, just as Jesus did.



Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:6-9

Reflection

For many Christians, Lent is a time to reflect on Jesus' journey through the wilderness, suffering and into new life. It is a time of fasting in order to align our priorities with God's priorities.

However, many people across our country are not choosing to go without – the cost-of-living crisis is forcing them to make impossible decisions between basic needs like heating and clothing, and eating.

In this reading from Isaiah, we hear words from God to His people during a time when they were fasting from food but ignoring the

suffering and injustice around them.

God says, I have not called you to merely go through religious rituals, but to love and care for the people around you.

This reading reminds us that true fasting means returning to God. It is a call to refrain not merely from food, but from indifference and injustice. And it is a reminder that to stop engaging in oppression is not enough.

To respond to God's call, we must be actively engaged in reform and respond faithfully and lovingly to the needs around us.



Questions for reflection (as a group or for individual reflection)



- What are the most pressing needs in your local community? Reflect on how these needs have changed over the past three years.
- What does it look like for our church community to care for people with urgent physical and spiritual needs?
- How can we use our voices, influence, skills and time to 'loose the chains of injustice'?

Spend some time praying for your community

- Take a postcard and use it to write a personal commitment to help create a more just and loving world. It can be a small or large action, or even a prayer asking for God's help.
- Spend a few moments in prayer or reflecting on your commitment. If you are taking part as a group, attach your commitment to a cross or other display.

Closing prayer



We pray to the Lord for courage to give up other things and to give ourselves to Him this Lent.

We pray for forgiveness for the times when we have turned away from suffering and been indifferent to injustice.

We pray for compassion so that we might give ourselves to meet the needs of others in loving service.

We pray for perseverance for all who are working to support their communities through these difficult times.

We pray for healing for the sick, shelter for the homeless, freedom for the oppressed and food for the hungry.

God of justice and mercy, hear our prayers and give us your grace as we answer your call to love and care for those around us. Amen



Church For All: a variety of voices and gifts

'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.' (Acts 2:4)

You'll need:

- Copies of the reading/bibles if inviting others to read.
- Bubble mixture if using the bubble prayer idea.



Opening words*

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

ALL: He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Reflection

At Pentecost the early church was given the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower them to participate in the amazing diversity of God's mission in the world.

On that day, the power of God's Spirit was revealed in tongues of flame, a powerful wind and a cacophony of many different languages; it brought about great change and transformation in the lives of the first disciples – to the world



Scripture Reading: Acts 2: 1- 21



IDEA!

Find out if anyone in your group speaks a different language. Ask them to read the scripture, or a section of the scripture, in their home language.

around them and the communities of which they were a part.



This diversity of languages speaks to God's desire to include everyone in his transforming love. Diversity in our community might not be found in different dialects – it might be found in age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, resource – and we are called to speak of and to show the love of God in every context.

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Pentecost (continued)

Reflection (continued)

As the Holy Spirit transforms us, so we are given the gifts - and the courage - to make the world a better place. The Holy Spirit equips us to challenge injustice, to respond to need with loving service, and to create community by

including people of all cultures, backgrounds and languages. In the power of the Holy Spirit we are sent out as missionary disciples to share the good news of God's all-embracing kingdom.

Questions for reflection (as a group or for individual reflection)



- How well do you know your local community?
- How does diversity bring strength and life to your community? Where might there be challenges?
- How are you responding to the diversity in your community? Is it reflected in the church's ministry and mission?

Spend some time praying for your community

IDEA!



Bring some bubble mixture for children (and adults) to blow during the prayer. As the bubbles are carried away by the wind, pray that God's Spirit would breathe life into your community.



Finish your time of prayer and reflection by moving outside for this prayer of blessing*

LEADER:

As we wait in silence,

PEOPLE:

fill us with your Spirit.

LEADER:

As we listen to your word,

PEOPLE:

fill us with your Spirit.

LEADER:

As we worship you in majesty,

PEOPLE:

fill us with your Spirit.

LEADER:

As we long for your refreshing,

PEOPLE:

fill us with your Spirit.

LEADER:

As we long for your renewing,

PEOPLE:

fill us with your Spirit.

LEADER:

As we long for your equipping,

PEOPLE:

fill us with your Spirit.

LEADER:

As we long for your empowering,

PEOPLE:

fill us with your Spirit.

ALL:

Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen

All Good Gifts: giving thanks for the gifts in our community

'We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.' (Romans 12:6)

Call to worship (from Psalm 106)

LEADER:

How good it is to give thanks to God.

PEOPLE:

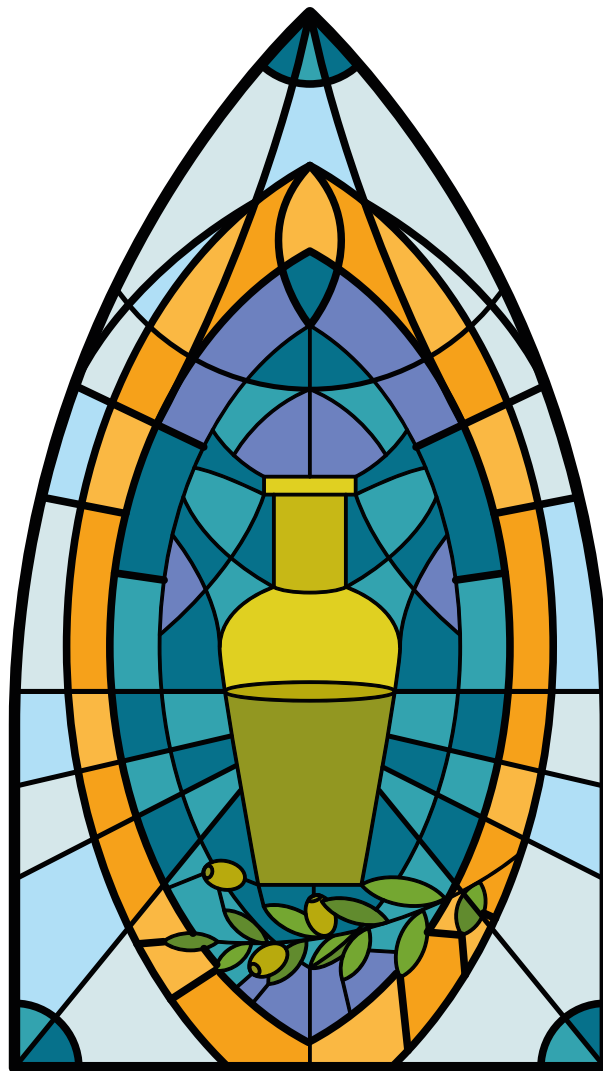
How great are God's works!

LEADER:

It is good to give thanks for God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

ALL:

Let us, then, give thanks to God. Let us worship God with thanksgiving!





Scripture reading: Romans 12: 3-8

Reflection

During the season of Harvest, we rejoice in God's generosity. We celebrate the gifts of the earth and the beauty of creation, and we express our gratitude to the God who gives them. We are also reminded to celebrate the generosity of so many people in our communities who give themselves in loving service to their neighbours and to the world.

Paul's letter to the Romans reminds us that that we are all given different gifts to share generously with each other, and for the good of our community. Yet we are also one body,

and it's only when everyone is enabled to bring their unique gifts that we truly flourish as individuals and as a community.



Together we are made to love God and love our neighbours. And we do this by sharing our individual gifts, many and varied as they are, for the benefit of everyone. God calls each us of us to show our love for others by offering what we can to the life of our community. Together we are thankful for what each one brings.

Harvest (continued)



IDEA!



Inviting others to be part of your harvest celebration. Harvest is a great opportunity to invite the wider community to join a special service of celebration. You could include an interview slot where you showcase the work of a local community project and interview one of their volunteers.

Questions for reflection (as a group or for individual reflection)



- How aware are you of your own gifts and the gifts of those around you?
- How can we help each person in our community to contribute their unique gifts for the good of everyone?
- How do we acknowledge and celebrate the gifts in our community?

Spend some time praying for your community

Closing prayer



Ever-present God, you are always inviting us to join in with what you are doing.

Strengthen your Church to serve you.

Give us the grace to meet human need through loving service, and to help build communities of hope and resilience.

We ask this through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unit of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

IDEA!



Head Heart Hands: This simple activity can help people of all ages identify their own gifts: gifts of the head (knowledge), gifts of the heart (passions) and gifts of the hands (practical skills). It encourages us to connect with other people with shared interests and to find out what gifts others have to contribute.

Find out how to use this activity as part of your service or with a small group by going to:

<https://cuf.org.uk/growing-good-in-every-season/HHH>



Church Urban Fund is a national charity working with local leaders, churches and other faith groups all over England.

Our vision is for a future where everyone in England can access a community of support when they need it most.

We work with and invest in local people, churches and community groups to tackle urgent issues, provide life-changing support and raise money.

As a Christian organisation, we are motivated by a vision of the world as God intends it to be. We are passionate about building communities where material needs are met and everyone feels connected, valued, and loved.



The Growing Good Toolkit is a FREE six session course helping churches explore the connection between social action, discipleship and growth.

www.growing-good.org.uk

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