**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

**Before using this service outline,
read the notes on** [**how to use the sessions**](https://www.methodist.org.uk/mwoloutlines)**.**

**Our Calling: Worship**

The umbrella term ‘Worship’ in Our Calling has three different dimensions: as well as worship in the traditional sense, there are also prayer, and noticing God. These practices might be called ‘breathing in’ God; they are intentional in connecting us to God and inform how we live in the world.

**Worship**

**“We worship with others regularly”**

One of the themes of this service is diversity and inclusion. Therefore, we encourage you to think about how your preparations for this service could be inclusive. Think about the range of people who will feature on the stage. Consider the readability of PowerPoint slides for people with sight issues or dyslexia. Embrace conversation and interaction to include people of all ages, or with concentration difficulties. A range of resources, training and suggestions [on the Inclusive Methodist Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-inclusive-methodist-church/) are available.

**Key themes**

* Worship is one way we respond to and celebrate God’s unbounded love of, and grace to, us.
* Worshipping with others helps to knit us into a faith community, with mission as “the natural, even inevitable, consequence” (*Called to Love* *and Praise*, 4.3.2).
* We also worship God through our everyday activities – at work, at home, and wherever we live our daily lives (Acts 2:46-47: worship over meals).
* Worship can ‘look’ different (eg music styles) but there are shared elements in Methodist churches: reading the Bible, participating in prayers, and singing songs.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Isaiah 29:13; Amos 5:21-24; Colossians 3:14-17; Revelation 4:9–11

**Background reflection**

Worship is the Christian community’s celebration of its faith in a living God. It is an exultation, a hymn of praise, a great thanksgiving, for the truth and love shown to us in Jesus Christ and made real for us by his transforming spirit. We sometimes call this ‘adoration’. When we worship, or ‘go to worship’, we do not need to ask God to be with us: God isn’t there just because we have come – we have come because God is already there and God welcomes our worship.

In responding to Our Calling as Methodist Christians, we should remember that regular worship is not only a feature of what we are called to do but is ‘a means of grace’, an activity to which God calls us so that our faith is strengthened and we become increasingly aware of God’s love. We are transformed through God’s grace. Worship should not be a passive recitation of words but an opening of ourselves to God’s power. We respond to God in heart, mind, body and soul.

*Share a story from your own experiences of adoration and transformation.*

Worship was at the centre of the practice of the Early Church but it may have looked quite different to our worship services today. Worship was a combination of time at the temple and domestic gatherings arranged around a celebration of the Last Supper. Luke tells us in Acts: “*Day by day*, as they spent much time together in the temple, they *broke bread at home and ate* their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God” (Acts 2:46).

*Opportunity for discussion: This may be a good time to ask the questions about your worship today.*

For many, worship is a daily exercise in faith (not just weekly), and regularity of worship is normative and formative in our discipleship. Historically, there are many examples of those who worship God daily: some in a monastic-type of setting such as Julian of Norwich, some burning with zeal for God’s grace such as John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Today, religious communities and a number of churches continue the tradition of daily services. People may not attend daily worship services, but is worship part of our daily lives in other ways?

This commitment refers specifically to worshipping with others. Why do we worship with others? The followers of Jesus are called to be a *community* of believers, a faithful people, and to make disciples of all nations (see Matthew 28:19 and 1 Peter 2:9-10).We also worship with others in the universal Church and with “all the company of heaven”. Though there are many differences between different denominations and movements, we are united in that we follow Jesus.

This community is a diverse one. People whom God calls to worship may not be like us in a number of ways, perhaps in terms of culture, race, social class, income, sexual orientation, age, disability, even understanding of the nature of Christianity – but all are welcome.

**Further notes**

* In *Called to Love and Praise* (1999), the Methodist Church stated that worship has “a twofold intention: first, adoration and praise, and second, our transformation by the grace and power of God.”
* Practically speaking, worship usually consists of a celebration of God’s presence, a proclamation of the good news for today, and an appropriate response to God’s saving grace in our lives. Around the world this occurs in many forms, according to tradition and circumstances, including on Sunday mornings in dedicated church buildings; in homes and hidden places; in Forest Church, Messy Church, Cafe Church, Digital Church, and many other forms.
* Public worship often happens on a weekly basis, and in a church building or other special place. A service of word and sacrament was the primary type of Christian worship until the Reformation. The primacy of preaching became much more common in the Western and post-Reformation traditions including Methodism (although John Wesley still expected his members to attend services of Holy Communion in their parish church on a regular basis). Now, with increased liturgical

and ecumenical cooperation, worship is again frequently a service of word and sacrament.

* Archbishop Rowan Williams, in *Being Christian* (SPCK Publishing), writing about Holy Communion, reminds us that we are there because God invites us, and we should remember that this obliges us to see the person next to us as wanted by God. God desires that person’s company as well as our own.
* The greetings from the writer at the beginning of several epistles give us insights into the spreading community of the Early Church, for example Romans 1:7 and Ephesians 1:1. It is clear that Paul valued the leadership of women (eg Apphia, Phoebe, Euodia, Syntche, Priscilla), often naming them in his greetings. The division between slave and free person (a bedrock of Roman society) was turned on its head (see Paul’s exhortion to Philemon that he treat Onesimus “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother” (Philemon 1:16-17)).
* Changes in how we understand and refer to race, ethnicity, nationality and geography (eg the place called Ethiopia in the Bible is not the same geographic place we know by that name today!) mean that we can miss how multi-cultural and multi-ethnic both the Old and New Testament [show God’s people to be](https://sojo.net/articles/faith-action/black-presence-bible-uncovering-hidden-ones). Jesus praised the faith of a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) and a Syrophoenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28). The disciples lived out Jesus’ exhortation to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-19). At Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out to people from modern-day Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, and Libya (Acts 2:5-11). “Simeon who was called Niger” (likely a black man) is listed as a prophet and teacher (Acts 13).

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Adore you – Harry Styles

Bless the Lord, O my soul (Ten thousand reasons) (*MP* 1259, see *StF All Sing!*)

Born in song (*StF* 21/*MP* 1260)

Come all you people, come and praise your maker (*StF* 22)

In the beauty of this place (*StF+)*

Let our praise be your welcome (Here for you) (*SoF* 2407)

O worship the Lord (*StF* 34)

You call us out to praise you (*StF+)*

You’re calling us (*StF* 37)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* What sort of worship refreshes you? Encourage people to share stories of how they worship God, and of things that prevent them worshipping God. How do these stories encourage and challenge us?
* How diverse is our worshipping community, compared to the demographics of our community? It may be helpful to [look at census data](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/) on age, gender, sexuality, marital status, etc, to help people consider this question (look at the [guidance](https://digitalblog.ons.gov.uk/2022/11/02/census-maps/) on using the interactive census maps from ONS).
* Are there ways that our worship could be more inclusive? What would we have to do/stop doing to make this happen?
* How far do our own traditions and prejudices affect our form of worship?

**Discussion questions**

* How would you describe worship? Why do you come to worship?
* How does the worship of the Early Church compare to worship today? Think about different denominations and movements in the

UK, and the global church. What is shared, and what changes? What can we learn from this for the future?

* What do you believe about encountering the divine? When have you felt close to God in worship recently?
* Are there ways that our worship could be more inclusive? What would we have to do/stop doing to make this happen?
* How far do our own traditions and prejudices affect our form of worship?
* Just as the worshipping ‘norm’ has changed throughout history, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated trends that have made Sunday service attendance more irregular. Do we need to fight this, or embrace the opportunity to think differently about ‘regular worship’?

**Prayer ideas**

*Prayers of adoration*

Sitting in a circle or along rows, ask each person to say one thing they love about God. It might be as simple as a single word, such as “Creator”, or a short sentence like “that God always loves me no matter what”. Alternatively, ask people to create something that shows the same thing, eg a drawing or a Lego model.

*Prayers for transformation*

Create a collage with all the different ways people would like to be transformed (or like your community to be transformed). Provide clippings of helpful images and words, such as love hearts, a workplace or neighbours. Play some soft music while people are invited to add to the collage using these images or their own drawings or words.

*Explore creative ways to pray with all ages, using the Methodist prayer cards, available as*[*a printed pack*](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/EGIPC22/intergenerational-prayer-cards)*for meetings and events,*[*a PowerPoint*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28465/intergenerationalprayercards-smaller.pptx)*for church services and meetings or*[*as a PDF*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28466/digital-prayer-cards-131222.pdf)*for digital use.*

**Ways to respond**

* Could we all go to different churches next week, and report back on our experiences? Or a mid-week service at a cathedral? How was worship similar/different? How did it help us to tune into God? What other opportunities do we have to worship as part of the universal Church? Think about ecumenical events, festivals, movements like [Thy Kingdom Come](https://www.thykingdomcome.global/).
* Explore historical changes in worshipping patterns by listening to a podcast, reading a book or watching a video on the history of the Church. Reflect on how the Church today can learn from these changes by [journalling](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/reflect-on-the-journey/journalling/), meeting in a [small group](https://www.methodist.org.uk/conversationspaces/), or speaking with your church leadership.
* Covid-19 has sped up the development of digital, or online, church. Explore what it means to be a digital church: read the stories of the [Church of the Living Stream](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/moving-to-an-online-church/) and the [Online Recovery Church](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/online-recovery-church/), and how digital church can [encourage inclusion and accessibility](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/becoming-an-accessible-hybrid-church/). If you’re interested in exploring digital church for your community, find out about [evangelism in a digital world](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/evangelism-in-a-digital-world/) and [digital communication guidance](https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/digital-communication-guidance-for-churches/).
* Explore [methodist.org.uk/MWOLWorship](http://www.methodist.org.uk/mwolworship), and think about some of the ideas there.
* Journal for one week on the place of worship in your daily life. How do you [notice God at work](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/reflect-on-the-journey/noticing-god/) in your job, your family, your quiet times, your community?