



Introduction

Welcome to this year's Easter Offering Service, which a group of women from across the Connexion started planning over 12 months ago. This service follows the tradition of 135 years to raise money for Methodist Women Missionaries. Today, it is the World Mission Fund that receives the money and prayers. In 2018, the Easter Offering service raised over £355,000.

The theme, 'Longer tables, lower fences' was inspired by these words: "When you have more than you need, build a longer table, not a higher fence."

We shall see pictures and hear stories of people throughout the world who are responding to God's call to show radical hospitality and outrageous generosity. As we share these stories, we pray for the grace and humility to share what we have been given, to extend our welcome to others and to break down the barriers that so often divide us.

This service is a gift from Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) to the whole Church; an act of worship, and also an opportunity to hear stories and to respond, both with money, prayers and with our actions in our daily lives. Each year, a different woman takes on the role of lead writer. The 2019 service has been written mainly by Anne Browse, President of MWiB 2015-2017 and a local preacher in the Tiverton and Wellington Circuit.

Our prayer is that this time of preparation and worship will help you to lengthen tables and lower fences: personally, collectively and in your outreach to others.

Please share these notes with others who are involved in planning your local service.

Make photocopies if that is helpful. Ensure all treasurers involved are familiar with the finance and Gift Aid instructions.

Before the service

- Arrange to distribute the **Easter Offering envelopes** (with the accompanying explanatory bookmarks) in each church in your circuit during Lent, and particularly on Easter Sunday.
- Ensure that church and circuit treasurers have a copy of the **guidelines/finance instructions** included in these notes and as a separate document on the MWiB and the Methodist Church websites.
- Use the **A3 posters** to advertise the service. Remember to complete the section showing when and where your service will take place. Smaller **A4-size posters** can be downloaded from the website and printed locally if you wish.
- Advertise your service in your local church magazines, through websites and on social media. Let everyone know they are welcome.
- Contact your MWiB District Forum Representative (see www.mwib.org.uk) with details of your service, so that this information can be included in the list of all local services in your district.

These notes should give you everything you need to explore the theme, as well as prepare for the service. You may also wish to use the Lent reflections on the MWiB website: www.mwib.org.uk

Please read through both the order of service and these resource notes to ensure you have everything you need in advance. Photocopy any part of this document you need for your service, particularly the stories that appear later on. We have also included ideas that can be used in children's or all age-settings, or as part of a more creative session. Please feel free to use these as best suits your local context.

Music

We have chosen the hymns that you will find in the order of service but understand that you may wish to have different ones. Other suitable hymns from *Singing the Faith (StF)* include:

- **StF 571** As your family, Lord, see us here
- **StF 611** Brother, sister, let me serve you
- **StF 663** I, the Lord of sea and sky
- **StF 664** Lord, you call us to your service
- **StF 687** One human family God has made
- **StF 693** Beauty for brokenness
- **StF 695** Come, now, you blessed
- **StF 706** Longing for light
- **StF 713** Show me how to stand for justice

The choral piece

There is space in the order of service for a choral piece if you would like to include one. We suggest *StF 699* (God of justice) which could be sung by a choir/group, or by the congregation, but you may wish to use this moment to add another hymn, or one from the World Church.

Copyright

All hymns included in the PowerPoint presentation come with an indication of copyright status. Please add your own church Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) and/or Calamus numbers to the final slide at the end of the presentation. Ensure the digital display/downloading of hymns is reported in your church's CCLI returns.

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Prayers and readings

Psalms 146, found in *StF* 837, is to be read responsively.

Reflections

You may wish a speaker to lead reflections at this point in the service, or to play some music quietly and give the congregation time to reflect on their own. Another idea would be a discussion in small groups, around how we can lengthen tables and lower fences (possible discussion questions are included in the additional resources).

As an example, here is a mini-sermon with three points for development:

- Longer tables and lower fences in the Old Testament (Isaiah 58:1-12)
- Longer tables and lower fences in the New Testament (John 6:1-13)
- Longer tables and lower fences today (local examples or examples from the news)

You may also like to pick up themes from the snapshots and stories, either through a talk or by showing the photographs again on the screen. The key themes are:

1. **Britain:** sharing food from different cultures; learning each other's languages.
2. **South Africa:** bringing people together to build relationships and develop confidence.
3. **Bangladesh:** the work of agencies such as All We Can in some of the most desperate situations in the world.
4. **Germany:** helping those who have moved into communities to feel welcomed and included.
5. **Ethiopia:** people in communities coming together to share resources and learn new ways of supporting themselves and their families.

Response

Allow a few moments at the end of the service for quiet reflection before the closing hymn and blessing. This year, we simply encourage people after the service, or at another time, to share refreshments together. There is a challenge at the end of the order of service for people to try to talk with someone they have not met before, or whom they do not know very well. Be aware that some people will not be able to move around the venue easily, so some others may need to move towards them.

This year's response is intentionally different to previous years. It does not need a tree or display board to stick things on. This should mean that a worship focus can be more flexible, so please use your creative ideas to set up something around the theme of long tables and low fences.

Snapshots and stories

Please photocopy the snapshots for your readers or find each individual story on the MWiB website. They are not included in full in the service sheets but are available on the website for anyone to download to read after the service. Pictures to accompany the stories are in the PowerPoint presentation and also available to download separately. Each story is in the form of a dialogue and will require two, or in one case three, readers.

Snapshot 1 – Longer tables in Britain

(Two readers, R1 and R2)

R1: In East Anglia, England, an International Women’s Group meets fortnightly in Newmarket. Let’s talk to group member Ruth Arnold about this photo.

Ruth, please tell us about your meetings.

R2: We meet around the big table in this photo. We always share coffee and food brought in by anyone who feels like cooking something at home. Sometimes we prepare regional dishes around the table for cooking, as shown here. Sometimes we have craft activities, such as flower arranging. On these occasions we make a note of any ‘new’ words for those whose first language is not English and try to use them often, so they become familiar.

R1: What was happening when this particular photo was taken?

R2: A Polish member had made us a carrot cake at the table while we chatted, and baked it in her grandmother’s ancient electric ‘baking pot’ from Poland. Another friend from Romania was making us a savoury dish to sample. She has very limited English but we could all understand the ingredients!

R1: How would you say your ‘table’ has become longer?

R2: This group was the inspiration of our Korean minister and his wife. We have met some wonderful women over the past couple of years and it has been a great blessing. We have had women join us from Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, India, Bangladesh, Italy, South Africa and several other African nations. We have a map and look up the places people are from when they first arrive.

R1: And how have ‘fences’ been lowered?

R2: Even though we do not all speak the same language, we are able to develop friendships and understanding as we eat together and enjoy food from our different cultures around the table. As we have shared these sessions together, so we have overcome language barriers.

R1: Thank you, Ruth.

Snapshot 2 – Longer tables in South Africa

(Two readers, R1 and R2)

R1: Carolyn Lawrence and Rachel Allison visited our mission partner the Revd Jane Day, in South Africa. Carolyn tells us about this gathering.

Carolyn, where was this photo taken?

R2: Near Johannesburg, in South Africa.

R1: And who are the people here?

R2: The women are gathered from neighbouring towns to participate in the 'Magnify – Women in Leadership' programme, written and led by the Revd Jane Day.

R1: What was happening on this occasion?

R2: The women had just taken part in an 'exploring spirituality' day on the theme of love, and had spent the morning engaging in a time of silence and listening to God, using a choice of guided activities and prayers. The morning had ended with a shared Holy Communion and here we see the ladies enjoying lunch together before going back to their homes.

R1: How has the 'table' become longer?

R2: The programme has now been run several times, and many women have been equipped, encouraged and empowered to serve God wherever they are in God's mission. Many have inspiring stories to tell of how the course has helped them to know

their value to God and how they have gone on to serve in many kinds of leadership roles.

R1: How have 'fences' been lowered?

R2: In a nation where, historically, there have been divisions on the basis of race and colour, these Magnify days bring together women from all backgrounds in a shared fellowship. Some have lived in South Africa all their lives and others have migrated here from Europe and other African nations. This is significant as, despite apartheid ending in 1994, there is still a legacy from those days of segregation and division, sadly even in some churches. These shared days are a beacon of hope in a dark place, demonstrating the way of unity in Christ.

R1: How can we pray for these people?

R2: Please pray for the nation of South Africa, that their president will lead with integrity and wisdom for the benefit of people of all backgrounds. Pray for continued healing and reconciliation among all people, and that Christians will unite to lead the way in seeking to address injustice and poverty.

R1: I understand that Jane Day herself has sent us a message?

R2: Yes, she wrote: "Many blessings and thanks for connecting with the World Church in this way – it really does matter."

Snapshot 3 – Longer tables in Bangladesh

(Three readers, R1, R2 and R3)

R1: Laura Cook, Communications Manager for All We Can, tells us about a little girl and her father in Bangladesh.

Laura, where and when was this photo taken?

R2: It was taken in early 2018 at Charmarkul Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. It was in one of the camps housing Rohingya refugees who had fled violence in Myanmar. The small home Mohammad and his family are living in is perched at the top of one of the hills in the camp.

R1: Who are the people here?

R2: In the image is Mohammad and one of his daughters, sat on the floor of their home in the camp. Their home is a small room created out of bamboo poles and plastic sheeting; their 'table' is the floor.

R1: Can you tell us more about them?

R2: The family had come to Bangladesh six months before, after a wave of violence in Myanmar. This one room acted as their family space for prayer, rest, conversation, play, sleep and meal times. Mohammad was sitting with his young daughters, wife and extended family and they were sharing their journey to Bangladesh with me.

R1: How has the 'table' become longer?

R2: 'The table' in this situation refers to the camp. In just six months, nearly 700,000 frightened, traumatised and desperate people made the journey from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Mohammad told the story of one particular way a seat at 'the table' was extended to him. He told me:

R3: *We had travelled for four days. We were tired and wet from the water and we had not eaten. We hid because we were scared that we would still be found and were not yet safe. We heard people coming and were frightened. But we then saw they were local people, people from Bangladesh, and they had come to give us chicken to eat as they could see we were hungry.*

R1: And how have 'fences' been lowered?

R2: The Rohingya people are used to 'raised fences' and members of the community in the Cox's Bazar camps live surrounded by fences that mark out the space. However, for many, the hospitality of strangers and the generosity of people who have supported them has meant a huge amount. Mohammad explained to me:

R3: We are safe here. We are happy here. We want to thank everyone who has helped us. We are grateful to God and grateful to those who have helped us.

R1: How can we pray for these people?

R2: All We Can asked 20 different Rohingya people for their prayer requests. These are the most common answers:

- R2: Pray for peace in Myanmar.
- R3: *Thank God for saving the Rohingya people.*
- R2: Pray for those who have helped them to have a long life and happiness.
- R3: *Pray for the Rohingya people, that they might be happy.*

R1: What difference have 'meals' like this made?

R2: The meals shared in these small spaces are life-saving. The meal of chicken described by Mohammad, bravely supplied by local Bangladeshi people, restored hope. Being able to eat as a family and to feel safe is something many give praise for. These meals are precious because they are restoring some sense of sanctuary and normality to very abnormal, traumatic circumstances.

R1: Thank you for sharing this story with us, Laura.

Snapshot 4 – Longer tables in Germany

(Two readers, R1 and R2)

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R1: In Germany, our mission partners Barry and Gillian Sloane are involved with Inspire – a fresh expression of church in the city of Chemnitz.

Gillian, who are the people gathered together here?

R2: This is a group of refugees from Syria and Iraq sitting alongside some of our team members. One of our team members is from Sierra Leone and another from Singapore. They work on The United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries.

R1: What is happening here?

R2: This is the creative handcrafts group for female refugees. We provide the materials and share tea and coffee together. The women are learning to speak German while they relax with their handcrafting.

R1: How has the 'table' become longer?

R2: News about the group is spreading, the women have told others and encouraged them to come along. The group is growing.

R1: How have 'fences' been lowered?

R2: The invitation to the handcraft group was translated into Arabic. This helped the women to feel welcome, they understood that we wanted to help them.

R1: How can we pray for these women?

R2: Please pray with us that these women will be helped to integrate into German society, that they will gradually learn to communicate in German, that they can begin to rebuild their lives.

R1: What difference have 'meals' like this made?

R2: Sharing around the table has helped the women feel they belong, that they are no longer strangers to us or to one another.

Snapshot 5 – Longer tables in Ethiopia

(Two readers, R1 and R2)

R1: Jill Baker visited Ethiopia when she was Vice-President of the Methodist Church in 2017/2018. She tells us about her photo: Jill is second from the left, helping Claire Welch from All We Can to cut the bread.

Jill, where were you when this photo was taken?

R2: The photo was taken in Ethiopia, at a women's self-help group.

R1: And who are the people in the picture?

R2: I am with Claire Welch and three staff members of the organisation that All We Can works with, which is currently helping poor rural communities in Ethiopia.

R1: Tell us, what was happening on this occasion?

R2: The women in the community have brought out their festival bread to celebrate our visit and we have been invited to cut it. Before the cutting, I was invited to pray over the bread, which was a very special moment.

R1: How has the 'table' become longer?

R2: The women have been encouraged to form small self-help groups, where they

save money and talk through issues which affect their lives. We were in the tiny hut where their meetings take place; the 'tables' were old school desks. Their delight at this new way of living and sharing in community was obvious, so they wanted to honour and thank those involved, including those of us representing All We Can supporters in the UK.

R1: And how would you say 'fences' have been lowered?

R2: Several men also came to the meeting when we were there, in some cases to represent their wives, who were unable to attend. This recognition by men of the worth of women's activities was seen as very significant by the local staff we were with.

R1: How can we pray for these people?

R2: Give thanks for their generous spirits and for the way they have embraced new ideas and ways of doing things. Pray that through their mutual support of each other they will find solidarity and strength to cope with often very challenging lives. Famine and food shortages are still common in much of Ethiopia.

R1: Thank you, Jill.

Finance/Gift Aid

Please read through these instructions and pass them to your church treasurer, Gift Aid secretary and, importantly, the circuit MWiB treasurer.

You can download instructions for collecting Gift Aid from the Methodist Church website at www.methodist.org.uk/giftaid.

These instructions apply to individual church collections. However, we recognise that most Easter Offering services are held as circuit-wide dedication services, in which case local churches may take a separate collection, with donations received by circuit officers.

In keeping with HMRC guidance for handling and banking donations, we recommend the following options for collecting and sending in donations using the Easter Offering collection envelopes.

Local Methodist churches are able to claim Gift Aid on their Easter Offering, either by using our Gift Aid Bureau Service*, directly from HMRC or through another third party churches may use to claim Gift Aid, if the following conditions are met:

1. local churches have used their discretion to set up a fund to support Connexional Funds – as is the case with Easter Offering donations that local churches receive from their members on behalf of the World Mission Fund.
2. local churches bank these donations into their accounts, and
3. local churches forward the Gift Aid money to the World Mission Fund.

This advice to Methodist churches for claiming Gift Aid on their Easter Offering is therefore based on the understanding that local churches have exercised their discretion to set up a fund to support the World Mission Fund.

HMRC guidelines on church collections and Gift Aid are available on the GOV.UK website via: www.bit.ly/churchcollections

OPTION 1

A. Collecting donations AND Gift Aid

- In the same way that other special collections are received (for example, All We Can, MHA or Christian Aid), please ask your church officers (Gift Aid secretaries or equivalent) to collect the sealed and completed Easter Offering collection envelopes (with cash/cheque donations enclosed) received from their congregation. Open the envelopes and hand over the total sum to the church treasurer (or equivalent) to pay the donations into the church bank account.
- If the church has received and banked the donations into the church bank account, the church officers should keep the empty Easter Offering collection envelopes for audit purposes and include banked donations on their church's Gift Aid claim form that is submitted to the Gift Aid Bureau Service. Do NOT send these envelopes to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House unless your church is unable to claim Gift Aid (see Option 2). Each church should keep these envelopes for six years in line with Gift Aid record-keeping requirements.

The above is the preferred income route we would encourage all churches to adopt where possible, in order to claim Gift Aid on donations.

*The Gift Aid Bureau Service of The Methodist Church processes Gift Aid claims for about 4,000 churches every year, reclaiming about £10m from HRMC on behalf of those churches. Once processed, the Bureau Service will transfer the relevant Gift Aid rebate to each church.

B. Sending in donations to the World Mission Fund

Once a church has collected and banked their donations into the church bank account, they can then do one of the following:

- The church treasurer can write a cheque, made payable to 'Methodist Church World Mission Fund' for the total amount donated (a further cheque will need to be sent when the Gift Aid amount is refunded). Bring (or send) the cheque for donations to the MWiB treasurer at the circuit-wide Easter Offering dedication service. All cheques should then be collected by circuit MWiB treasurers and banked using the 'O2' paying-in-books.
- If churches cannot get in touch with their circuit MWiB treasurer, cheques may be sent to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House with a covering letter indicating the circuit's name and ID number, so that those donations can be properly attributed.

OPTION 2

If the church is unable to claim Gift Aid through the Gift Aid Bureau Service, or if cheques have already been made payable to the World Mission Fund, then follow the instructions below:

A. Collecting donations

Church officers (Gift Aid secretaries or equivalent) collect the sealed and completed Easter Offering collection envelopes (with cash/cheque donations enclosed) received from their congregation.

B. Sending in donations

1. Send donations (cheques/cash) and Gift Aid envelopes to the circuit MWiB treasurer who will then bank the donations using the 'O2' paying-in book and send envelopes to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House, with a covering letter stating the donations banked, circuit name, circuit ID number and the date they were banked.
2. If churches **cannot** get in touch with their circuit MWiB treasurer, they can send donations and envelopes directly to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House.

Note: If you choose to follow this option, churches cannot claim Gift Aid as they have not banked donations into their own accounts.

In both cases, make any cheques payable to 'Methodist Church World Mission Fund', **not** 'MWiB' and do not send them to Methodist Women in Britain.

For more information about claiming Gift Aid, Gift Aid rules, and frequently asked questions on Gift Aid, please contact your church Gift Aid secretary.

Please **do not** send the Finance Office cash donations by post. Deposit cash into your church account and send in a cheque for the same amount, payable to 'World Mission Fund'.

Appendix to leader's notes

Additional resources

Introduction This appendix to the main leader's notes contains a selection of additional resources and ideas based on the theme of 'Longer tables, lower fences', some of which you may wish to use in your own setting. You can use these optional activities with children and young people; with adults as part of the Easter Offering Service; as an optional extra session or as part of a small group; or as part of an all-age or 'Messy Church' style event, choosing a few of the activities from the menu. Feel free to adapt these materials to suit your own situation and be creative!

Sharing

Around the table

Set up a long table and sit around it. Share a simple time of eating, talking and listening together.

Consider the challenges of sitting at a long table.

- Can everyone hear each other?
- Does anyone feel excluded?
- How do we include everyone?
- What about those who prefer just to sit and listen?

You may also like to use the resource 'Table Talk', described as a game of conversations. It is available as sets of cards, designed for specific groups and situations, or as a free app which can be downloaded. Find details at www.table-talk.org/

Consider what other activities you could do around your table? Games? Craft? Writing postcards or letters together to support a campaign? The possibilities are endless!

Snapshots and stories

Use this year's stories to consider how tables can be lengthened and fences lowered.

Take one of the photos and look at it carefully. You might show it on screen or print it out for people to study. Consider these questions for the photo you have chosen.

Longer tables in Britain

- Are there people from other countries and cultures living in your area?
- How could you share each other's stories and traditions?
- Festivals are good – could you invite people to bring food from their own tradition to a shared meal, and perhaps demonstrate or try out a recipe together, as the women in East Anglia do? Afterwards, consider any new words and ideas you have learned as a result.

Longer tables in Germany

As well as eating together, it can be helpful to do something practical together. Coming together around craft activities is already popular in many places.

- Do you already have such groups, for example, 'Knit and Natter' or 'Messy Vintage'?
- If so, is there anyone you could invite to join you, so that you 'lengthen your table'?
- Could you set up a group, or a one-off event, perhaps learning a new craft, or to benefit others, such as knitting squares for special care babies, knitting trauma teddies or so on?

Longer tables in Ethiopia

Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread. Gather together to share a very simple meal of bread and water or fruit juice. Choose a large loaf to break and share, bearing in mind the requirements of the group.

- Do you need the loaf to be gluten free?
- How would you want to pray over the bread, as Jill Baker was invited to do?
- What are your prayers and longings for your group, your family, your church, your community, the world?
- Write a prayer together in some way, and then pray it before you eat.

You might like this to be a simple communion service, if you are able to find someone willing and approved to lead in your setting.

Longer tables in Bangladesh

A 'table' does not have to be an actual piece of furniture, it may be a metaphor for the meeting place of a community or a group within a community. In the snapshot from Bangladesh there is no physical table, but Laura Cook says that the 'table' is the refugee camp.

- Can you identify similar 'tables' in your own community?
- Where do people gather, or find themselves thrown together? In supermarket queues? In waiting rooms? At bus stops? On trains?
- How can we build community in those places?

Longer tables in South Africa

- Are there people who need to come together to encourage each other?
- Could you invite people from different churches or different faith communities in your area to a communal meal, perhaps with 'bring and share' food?
- What questions might you discuss together?
- How might you really listen to each other and get to know each other better?

Thinking

Exploring the Bible readings

Read through the passages used in the Easter Offering service: Psalm 146; Isaiah 58:1-12; John 6:1-13.

In a small-group setting you may wish to think about the following questions together:

- What do you think it means to 'build longer tables' in your personal life, in your community and in the wider world?
- What are the metaphorical 'fences' that need to be lowered, or even broken down? Again, consider examples in your personal life, your community and the wider world.
- In the reading from Isaiah, as well as being encouraged to reach out to others, we are reminded not to neglect our own families. Is this a danger for any of us? How?
- How can we find opportunities to get to know people who are different from us?
- Read the story of the 'Feeding of the five thousand' (John 6:1-13) and talk about it together!

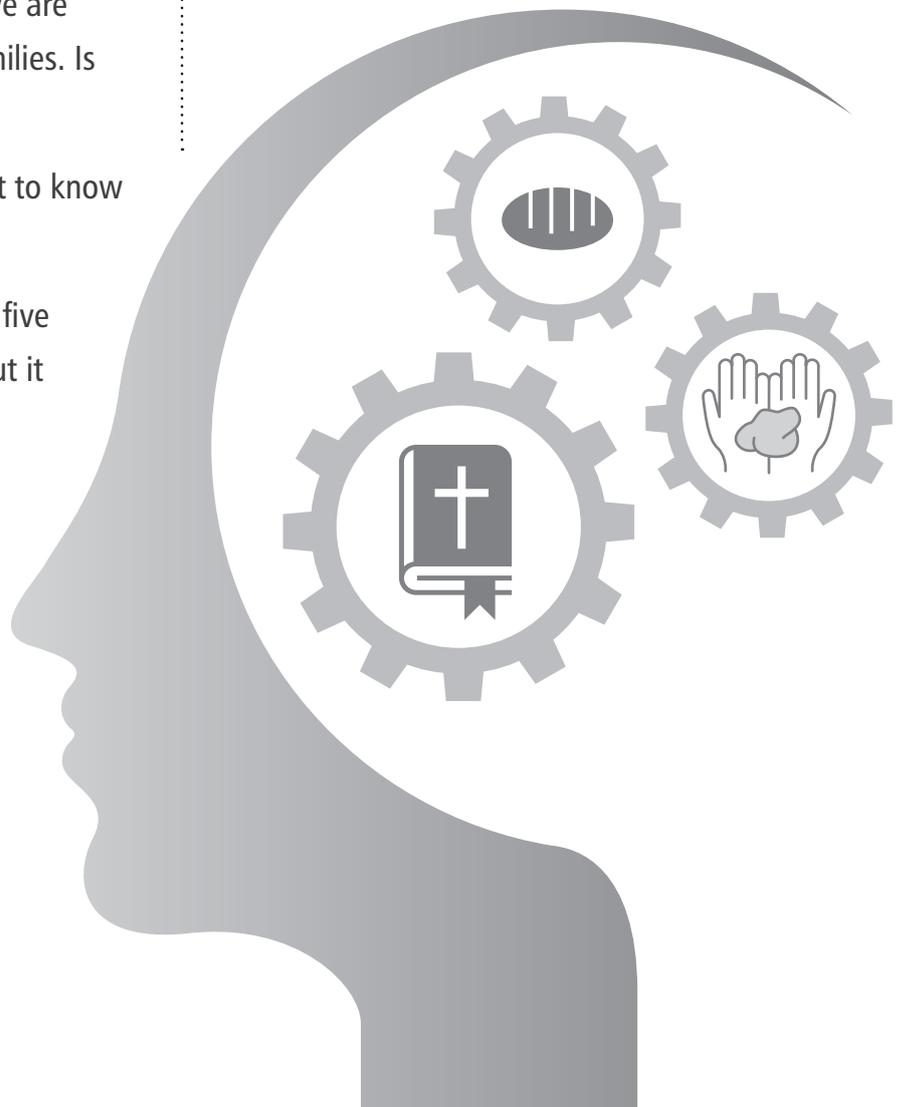
Finding out

Fact file

Create a fact-file collage or booklet about Germany, Ethiopia, Bangladesh or South Africa. Find out about the flag, language, customs, climate, music, food and so on.

Making bread or home-made playing dough

Find out more about the food, especially the bread which is eaten in these countries, and make rolls or loaves or flat bread. If you do not want to bake real bread you could model items using home-made playing dough or salt dough. You may wish to invite people to place their finished articles in baskets or on plates on a 'long table' as part of your Easter Offering service.



Home-made playing dough recipe

- 1 mug plain flour
- Half mug salt
- 1 mug water
- 1 tablespoon oil (baby oil makes it smell nice)
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
- Food colouring

1. Put ingredients together in a saucepan.
2. Stir over a gentle heat until mixture leaves side of pan.
3. Knead gently.
4. Store in an airtight container in the fridge.

Creating

Acrostic poems and prayers

Use the words 'TABLE' and 'FENCE' and think of a different line for each letter of the word as a poem or prayer. Create a display of everyone's poems and prayers.

Example: **T** – Tables
A – Allow
B – Bread and
L – Love to be
E – Extended to all

F – Fences and
E – Enmity
N – Need to
C – Come to an
E – End



Links to other resources, such as films and songs, are available on the MWiB website, together with photos and reports of previous Easter Offering services. Do look at www.mwib.org.uk for further ideas and inspiration. Please ensure that you have the appropriate licences for anything you choose to use.

Watch and listen to the song Vagabonds

<https://youtu.be/s27D7M8biul>

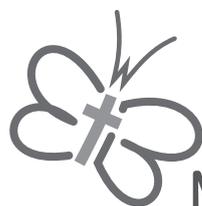
and this video about why Stuart Townend wrote it:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zryGXQb_yXI

Watch this video from All We Can

<https://vimeo.com/258645075>

about a girl called Asmida.



Methodist Women
in Britain

The **Methodist** Church 
*Living **generously***
