

For those preparing to lead this Local Arrangement Service.....

Greetings!

I'm so glad you've decided to use this service for the Own Arrangement service designated on the plan for your congregation. I hope you find it helpful. The service is designed for the period between the Resurrection of Christ at Easter and the coming of the Holy Spirit to the first Christians at Pentecost. We are looking at that puzzling time for the disciples, when they have been through the great gamut of emotions, from painful loss, sorrow and disillusionment, to overwhelming joy, relief and amazement. They are left with the question 'What next?' How are they to start their lives again?

In thinking about this theme, it seemed to me that many of us have periods in our lives where the normality of life is completely destroyed, the course of life's journey is changed forever and we are not sure where it is leading. We've got through this far, but what next? How does what we have experienced, get us back, with God's help, on a new and possibly better path? How do we start again? These were my questions after a dark period of bereavement and serious illness in my life. I particularly want us to think in this service about how God helps us to get through the big changes and challenges in our life, and how he can use those experiences for our benefit and the benefit of others.

You will see, on the third page of the service, under 'Stories', two stories about how people have used difficult experiences to 'start again' by doing new things. These two stories are *only suggestions*, and you could use either one or both. But, **far better**, if you can find a member or members in your congregation who have been through challenging or life-changing experiences and feel that God has helped them through and given them a new direction in their Christian life because of those experiences. If people are reluctant to speak in the service, perhaps they could write their story down for someone to read for them. **Alternatively**, find a story from your local community about someone who has turned tragedy/disaster into an opportunity to help others.

The prayer of Adoration and the prayer of Confession come from *The Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary, volumes 4 & 10* respectively. The hymns are only suggestions – if your congregation knows others that fit in with the theme, especially any newer ones, please use those. This is *your* service of worship to God.

I hope you enjoy your service and find it helpful.

Local Arrangement Service post Easter
'Starting Again'

Call to Worship: (Leader 1)

Praise to our God
 who raised our glorious Lord Jesus from the dead,
 who has given us a living hope nothing can destroy.
Alleluia, Praise to our God. Amen.

HYMN: I know that my Redeemer lives... *StF 303; H&P 196; MP 278; HON 301.*

Prayer of Adoration: (Leader 2) (by Joyce Barrass)

Lord of miracle and mystery, you come walking to us on the beach of the morning.
We come before you in the morning light,
to worship the One who made heaven and earth and all that are in them.
You lift us up when life seems too pressing in its demands, when nets are empty and spirits low.
You point us in the right direction when we walk on the wrong roads.
As we worship, make the scales fall from our eyes, to see you as you are.
O Lord our God, we give you thanks forever. **Amen.**

Introduction to the service: (Leader 1)

The terrible suffering and sorrow of Good Friday and the intense joy and excitement of Easter Sunday are now in the past for the disciples, even if ever present in their thoughts. And although they know now that Jesus is still with them, they have come to the point where they must have been asking 'What next?' Many of us, because of what has happened in our lives, may have been, or may be now, at that point, 'What next?' 'How do I start again after what has happened?' In our service this morning we will be looking at what it might mean to start again.

'Starting Again' – The Disciples back to where it started

Reading: (Reader 1) – John 21:1-14

Reflection – Peter: (Reader 2)

It had been the best of times and it had been the worst of times, those three years with Jesus. On the Cross he said 'It is finished', but it has not! To our amazement he has returned! But, in spite of our joy we feel confused and disorientated by all that has gone on. What do we do next? The safest and most obvious thing is to go back to the lives we knew before meeting Jesus, to take up where we left off and go back to Galilee where it all started what seems a lifetime ago. So, we are back to go fishing...this time for fish, not for men.

I know that I was a failure as a disciple. My heart was in the right place but my brain wasn't always connected! I made a lot of mistakes, and the last was the worst of all. That wasn't through stupidity, but sheer loss of nerve. I denied knowing Jesus. I denied being his friend and disciple. I denied him three times.

And now, it seems, I've come back a failure as a fisherman. We've been out on the boat all night and not caught a thing. Someone on the shore shouted out to us to throw our nets out again on the other side. So we'll do that. We'll start again, and perhaps what else we need to do as followers of a Risen Christ will become clearer. Perhaps there is hope even for me.

Reading: (Reader 2) – John 21:15-19

Prayer of Confession: (Leader 2) (by Neil Dixon)

Be gracious to us, loving God, and listen to our prayer.

Forgive us for the many times when our deeds have belied our words.

Like Peter, we have boasted our allegiance and then denied our Lord.

We have failed in humble service, we have failed in trust and obedience, and we have failed in love and forgiveness.

As your Son forgave Peter and called him to shepherd his sheep, graciously forgive and renew us and recall us to your service.

We ask it in his name, **Amen.**

Poem: (Reader 3)

'I shall know why' by Emily Dickinson

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| 1. | I shall know why, when time is over,
And I have ceased to wonder why;
Christ will explain each separate anguish
In the fair schoolroom of the sky. | 2. | He will tell me what Peter promised,
And I, for wonder at his woe,
I shall forget the drop of anguish
That scalds me now, that scalds me now. |
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HYMN: I am a new creation.. *StF 553; MP 254; HON 283 OR* It is a thing most wonderful *H&P 224*

'Starting Again' – a new way of seeing – Paul

Introduction to the reading from Acts: (Leader 1)

Saul, later known as the apostle Paul, had earlier watched with approval as the first Christian martyr, the deacon Stephen, was stoned to death. He looked after the killers' cloaks. He was intent on destroying the church. But later he learned that he needed a new way of seeing – he needed to 'start again'. Listen to his story.....

Reading: Acts 9:1-20 (Reader 4)

Reflection: 'How Ananias saw it...' (Reader 1)

When you live in an occupied country, a knock on the door in the middle of the night fills you with terror. I was praying when the Lord came knocking on the door of my life in a vision. And I was truly terrified when I heard what he wanted me to do! He told me I had to go to Saul – that great persecutor and killer of the followers of The Way. I trembled in my sandals. And what was more, the Lord said, Saul was expecting me. He had had a vision of me going to him and curing his blindness. 'Saul is blind?' I asked. 'Isn't that a good thing for us? He'll find it more difficult persecuting us if he can't see!' But, as you know, it's no good having that sort of conversation with the Lord. His ways are not our ways. 'Well,' I thought 'if Saul's seen me coming to him in a vision from the Lord, I shall have to go... even though the prospect of meeting him scares me rigid. What will happen if I can't restore his sight?'

So I went. And I did open his eyes, in more ways than one. His first view of the Lord had been a blinding one. The Lord, I helped him to see, is the Way, the Truth and the Life. And so the new life of Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, began.

Story: 'Sydney's story' (Reader 2) from 'Stories & Journeys', MHA

Sydney, a male resident in his eighties in an MHA home, regarded himself as an atheist. He had been long committed to communism and social action, making an important contribution to this country and to some in the Third World. He was gentle, humorous and intelligent and was highly regarded by staff and residents. In conversation with the chaplain he expressed an interest in Methodism, wanting to know more about it. He read about the founders of the movement and was particularly struck by their social involvement. He began to talk about them in a positive way. He asked if he might attend a service held in the home, which he did for 6 weeks, and after attending one of these he accepted an invitation to attend a meditation group in which there was a period of ten minutes silence and stillness.

Sydney said this had been a great privilege and then paused and said, 'I saw God.' He found meaning and connection with the holy in stillness; so much so that just before he died he wanted to be known as a Christian.

HYMN: All I once held dear... *StF489; MP799; HON18 OR* O the bitter shame & sorrow... *H&P538*

'Starting Again' – life from death – Hezekiah

Introduction to reading: (Leader 1)

Most of us will experience times in our lives when we know that nothing will ever be the same again – life-changing events. Some of these events are both painful and shattering, shaking us to the core. Serious illness, disablement, bereavement, relationship or mental breakdown, loss of income, all challenge our way of looking at life. And when, if we do, we get through, and find we are still alive – what do we do with our lives then? This is the situation faced by King Hezekiah in our next reading....

Reading: Isaiah 38:1a; 9-20

Stories: (Reader 3) (or personal story or testimony)

[<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/get-inspired/32203323>]

Marathon runner Chris Burt readily admits the moment he chose to run his first marathon resembles a mid-life crisis. For the 40-year-old, April 2015 was a chance to celebrate the five-year anniversary of being free from cancer with a life-affirming 26.2 mile slog around the streets of London. Chris says: "There are definitely other easier and more relaxing things that I could have chosen to celebrate my five-year anniversary. After watching London last year I had a bit of a light-bulb moment and decided I wanted to run - even though I've never been a runner. The fact that I turned 40 as well this year made me feel like I wanted to go out and prove something to myself. "While I have been doing the training I have had a lot of time to reflect on what happened. You can't help but think about it, it's either that or the pain of running." Chris is running to raise money for his local Leukaemia & Lymphoma Unit.

OR/AND

[<https://quarriers.org.uk/about-us/history/>]

William Quarrier was born in a tenement in Greenock, Scotland, in 1829. His father died when he was three years old and his family moved to Glasgow. William began working in a pin factory at age six, and he became an apprentice shoemaker when he was about seven and a half. Glasgow was a wealthy, growing city at that time, but the people in the slums were very poor and William and his friends were often cold and hungry.

When William was seventeen he went to work as a shoemaker for a Mrs Hunter and began attending Blackfriars Baptist Church, where he became a Christian.

Through hard work, William soon had three shoe shops of his own. But William never forgot the difficulty of his childhood and developed a strong social conscience. One November night in 1846, William Quarrier was travelling home after a day's work. While crossing Jamaica Street Bridge he met a match-seller who was crying because others had stolen all his goods. William gave the boy money, and as he continued towards home, he thought about what had happened to the boy and decided to do something about it.

Having been on trips to London, he had seen the shoe blacks, young boys who were able to earn money by polishing shoes. He wrote a letter to the Glasgow Herald saying that a similar scheme should be set up in Glasgow. A meeting was arranged and some 30 boys turned up, and Glasgow's first Shoebblack Brigade was formed.

The Brigade worked well but William Quarrier felt that more should be done for those who were sleeping rough in the back alleys of Glasgow. He wrote again to the Glasgow Herald, outlining the need for a home for orphaned and destitute children. He received a donation, and used this to open a night refuge in Glasgow, in 1871, and so the work of the Orphan Homes of Scotland was born.

Offering & Prayer of Commitment: (Leader 2)

Loving Lord, you have given us Christ; you have given us one another to love and care for; you have given us life's journey to travel with you.

And so we ask you to accept this offering of money,
and with it our dedication of all that we have, all that we are, and all that we do,
to help others start again on the life journey with you. In the name of the Risen Saviour, **Amen.**

HYMN: Through all the changing scenes of life... *StF 638; H&P73; MP 702; HON 675.*

Prayers of Intercession: (Leader 2)

In this prayer there is opportunity for silence and also a response:

L: This is our prayer: **R: Help us to know and to do your will.**

Let us pray:

Loving God, our guiding Light, we have many decisions to make along life's path:

decisions about our relationships with others;
decisions about what do with our time and money;
decisions about how we should use our power to vote or influence others;
decisions about our relationship with you.

In Christ you show us the Way we should go.

We pray for the guidance you alone can give... *SILENCE*

(and we pray for.... *(current situations regarding decisions or for decision-makers....)*)

L: This is our prayer: **R: Help us to know and to do your will.**

Loving God, source of all Wisdom, there is much we need to learn along life's path:

we need to understand other people;
we need to understand the world around us and our place in it;
we need to seek a meaning and purpose for our lives.

In Christ you show us the Truth we should know.

We pray for the wisdom you alone can give... *SILENCE*

(and we pray for.... *(current concerns about the work & witness of the/your church)*)

L: This is our prayer: **R: Help us to know and to do your will.**

Loving God, the giver of Life, you have offered us everlasting life if we walk life's path with you:

through the bad times of sickness and sorrow;
through the good times of confidence and happiness;
following the narrow way of dedication to you and the stony road of self-giving love.

In Christ you show us the Life we can share.

We pray that we might know your gifts of peace, hope and joy... *SILENCE*

We pray for the fullness of life that you alone can give.

L: This is our prayer: **R: Help us to know and to do your will.**

We make our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ,
the Way, the Truth and the Life for all the world. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer:

HYMN: One more step along the world I go... *StF 476; H&P 746; HON 510.*

Dismissal: (Leader 1)

We have not been offered an easy life;

We have not been offered a safe life;

But we have been offered real and joyous eternal life!

Let us go out to live the life that God calls us to,
in the power of the Risen Christ. **Amen.**