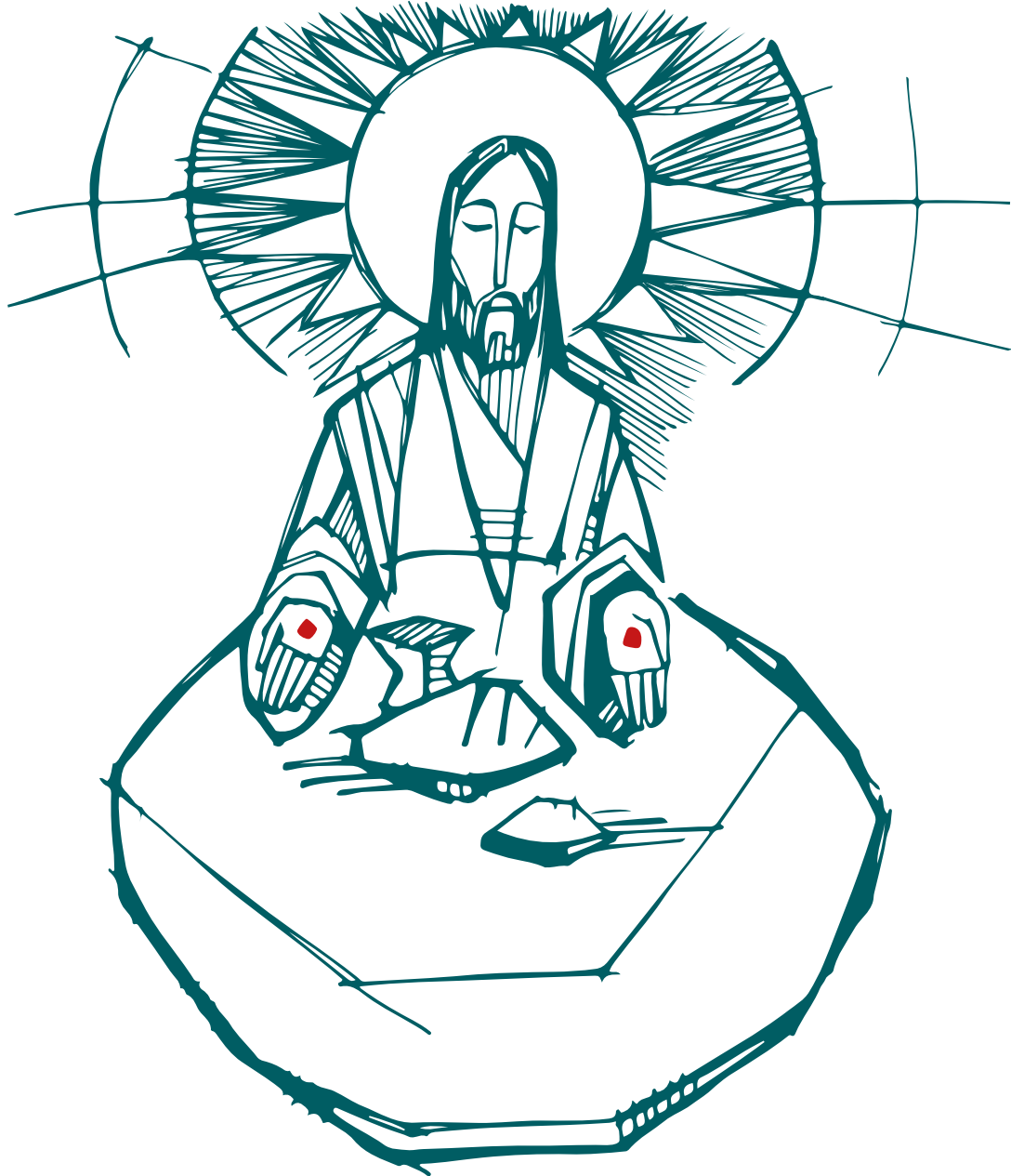


God's table: an invitation for all



**Worship for the presidential
theme 2021/2022**

Welcome

Welcome to worship resources that take a global Church perspective of this year's presidential theme 'God's table: an invitation for all'.

There are two services, each with fresh and inspirational material from Methodists working around the globe.

Service 1

Should be led by a presbyter, deacon or local preacher, and can be adapted for all-age worship.

Service 2

Is a 'Local Arrangement' service, which can be led by a worship leader, steward or other church member.

The services can be used on any Sunday. We suggest church councils work with local preachers' meetings to agree a date for using them. The two services are different, so a congregation should be able to use both during the year.

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Please note: These worship resources are for your church whether or not you make an offering to the World Mission Fund (WMF) on the Sunday you use them. We hope they will be a blessing to you.

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Stay safe:

Visit www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/official-guidance/ to get the latest advice on running a service safely during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are two short films to complement some of the written materials. There are also PowerPoint presentations of both services. To access these, visit www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-worldwide/global-relationships/get-involved-globally/resources/

May God bless us as we worship and grow, inspired by God's people across the world.

President and Vice-President's Introduction

Welcome to worship resources that take a global Church perspective of this year's presidential theme 'God's table: an invitation for all'.

In these resources, we celebrate belonging to the family of God, which spans the globe. As we learn from one another and pray for the worldwide Methodist family, may we be inspired by the different understandings of mission and cherish the fact that we are all called, and all invited, to God's table of grace and mercy.

The Revd Sonia Hicks writes...

For my Presidential visit, I had two virtual trips to the churches of Southern Africa (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa) and also to Zimbabwe. As the theme is 'God's Table: an invitation for all', time was spent meeting with different groups such as young people and women in South Africa, as well as exploring what the theme meant to All We Can partners in Zimbabwe.



Barbara Easton writes...

For my Vice-Presidential visit, I went to the Methodist Church of Peru. I was surprised to discover just how vast the country is and how diverse – besides the urban coastal cities, I met Methodists from churches in villages in the barren high mountain areas and in others in the dense Amazon rainforest. Wherever there is a Methodist church it is a hub of service to the local community – there were people who were running food programmes, developing green initiatives and working with refugees.

Service 1

Note to leader

This service should be led by a presbyter, deacon or local preacher. You may adapt it to suit your congregation. You can just feature some all-age elements, or make it completely all-age by using both all-age options and omitting the sermon. There are two all-age talks/activities: 'A basket of fruit', prepared by the President of the Conference and 'A table in Hong Kong', prepared by the Methodist International Church in Hong Kong and a choice of hymns to complement the themes. We also offer detailed sermon notes and suggestions for prayers. There is an accompanying PowerPoint that you can download [here](#).



Photo: Matt Gonzalez-Noda

Call to worship

Suggested form of words:

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and you that have no money, come, buy and
eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money
and without price.

Isaiah 55:1

(New Revised Standard Version, NRSV)

Let us come to God in worship and
thanksgiving.

Opening hymn/song

Choose from:

As the deer pants for the water (*StF 544*)
Great is thy faithfulness (*StF 51* or *H&P 66*)

Prayers of praise and confession

See suggestions

All-Age talk option 1 'A basket of fruit'

Reading

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Hymn

Choose from:

What shall our greeting be
(*StF 691* or *H&P 806*)
He's got the whole world
(*StF 536* or *H&P 25*)

Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>

All-Age talk option 2 'A table in Hong Kong'

Including discussion cards activity

Reading

Ruth 2:5-14

Hymn

Choose from:

Shalom Chaverim (StF 414)
Come sinners to the gospel feast
(StF 401 or H&P 460)

Reading

Luke 14:12-24

Hymn

Choose from:

I, the Lord of sea and sky (StF 663)
Come, let us sing of a wonderful love
(StF 443 or H&P 691)

Sermon

See Sermon outline, with reflections and stories from Partner Churches

Hymn

Choose from:

Let us build a house where love can dwell (StF 409)
There's a spirit in the air
(StF 398 or H&P 326)

Offering

Suggested form of words

Dear loving God, with these gifts we offer our lives in the service of your kingdom in this place and in this world. In Jesus' name, **Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

See suggestions

Hymn

Choose from:

Will you come and follow me (StF 673)
The right hand of God is writing in our land
(StF 715 or H&P 408)

Blessing

Go out from this place entrusted with the good news of God's welcome for all in Christ Jesus, whose disciples you are. And may the blessing of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

All-Age Materials

A basket of fruit

By the Revd Sonia Hicks, President of the Conference



Photo: Getty Images

YOU WILL NEED: A basket of different types of apples/bananas

QU: How many different types of apples can we grow in Britain?

ANS: Seven (Red Prince, Bramley, Cox's, Evelina, Gala, Cameo and Spartan).

QU: Can anyone guess how many varieties of apples are grown worldwide?

ANS: Over 7,500 different types.

Different types of apples can be used in different ways. For instance, we use Bramley apples for pies and sauces.

Apples grow in Britain but in other countries, different types of fruit grow.

Show a banana

QU: Does anyone know what this fruit is?

QU: If there are over 7,500 types of apples, how many types of bananas are there?

ANS: Over 1000.

This tells us that God loves variety. The world that God created has different types of fruit, flowers, trees, animals and people. All are different and yet all are created by the same God.

The Bible tells us in the Book of Genesis: 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good...' (Genesis 1:31, NRSV)

In Jamaica, there were over 150 different types of bananas. Some bananas were small and sweet. Others were beautifully curved. Some grew well near to the sea. Others grew well among other plants. One day, people came and told the Jamaicans to grow only the bananas that sold well in Europe. So, only one or two varieties were grown for the market. Then, one year, a disease hit all the banana plants. And because only one or two varieties were being cultivated, the disease spread throughout the plantations and the entire crop was lost. But the farmers who grew lots of different banana plants found that some varieties were able to survive. Having different sorts of banana plants meant that not all the crops were lost.

QU: Do you think God prefers daisies or roses?

Daisies and roses are equally beautiful to God, just as we are equally lovely to God. God made a world that has different people in it, as well as different animals and different types of fruit. But God loves the world and we, as God's people, should love all of creation equally too.

St. Paul makes the same point that we are all equally loved and important by using the image of the body. Let's hear his words to the Church at Corinth now, in which Paul reminds us how valuable each person is.

Light of the World

By the Revd Eden Fletcher, Superintendent Minister of the Methodist International Church, Hong Kong

Behind the towering 22-storey new building of Methodist International Church in Wan Chai, Hong Kong, old, winding, narrow streets criss-cross and intersect. Those streets, lined with painted high-rise tenement blocks, are a reminder of old Hong Kong. Along the usually bustling streets busy workshops, metalwork shops, car repair shops and newly opened urban art galleries lead to the Pak Tai temple, itself a reminder that once, 150 years ago, this area was a small fishing village on the water's edge. Now, land reclamation means that the temple stands some two miles away from the harbour.

Early on a very quiet Christmas day morning in 2019, as I walked my rescue dog, Lulu, through the streets, I came upon a group of people sitting around a hastily-erected table, all chattering away and laughing joyfully together. The men and women spoke different languages, some English, others Cantonese, Mandarin and still others Tagala, one of the languages of the Philippines. The excited, chattering group sat together on the unusually quiet road and at the end of the table a BBQ was lit. Smoke drifted upwards giving off a delicious, mouth-watering aroma. Fish was cooking, as well as a pot of rice, a Filipino dish, some vegetables and drink.

As I turned the corner that early morning onto the scene, I was powerfully and surprisingly caught up for a moment in the sacramental nature of what I was witnessing! A table spread before me, on the normally busy but now deserted road, right in the middle of the community; a table, around which gathered together people from different cultures and languages and nations; a joyful gathering of men and women eating and sharing conversation together. One of the men turned

to me as I drew near and with a beaming smile beckoned me over to join the group. I was deeply moved on that early Christmas morning.

I thought of Jesus cooking fish beside the sea for the disciples who had been fishing all night long and caught nothing, 'Come, sit and eat, you are tired, exhausted even from your night's work, come refresh yourself at the table, you are all very welcome.'

I will never forget that heart-warming scene on that early Christmas morning of 2019 in those old back streets of Hong Kong, after months of protest against the government's extradition bill which had filled the streets with angry crowds and sometimes violence. I made my way back to the church to prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth, God had come, born amongst the dirt and grime of our world, born into the sometimes angry, unwelcoming streets of cities and towns and villages. God did not hide and would not be confined in temples, churches or palaces but burst out into the streets, inviting all to come and eat with him. God invites us all to do the same, to come, whoever you are and wherever you come from, whatever your language or culture or background, come and dine at the table of the Lord's invitation; you are all welcome. And he invites us to go out into the world to invite others.



Photo: Getty Images

Activity: Story Cards

- A. The A4 page can be printed off and the six cards cut out to produce separate question cards
- B. Or choose some questions that have been placed on the power point as separate slides (Read the slides)

If working with a small group you may want to use option A (be mindful of the ages and reading abilities in the group).

If using in a worship context as a whole group, you may want to use option B.

Bear in mind that during Covid-19 restrictions people will be wearing masks and social distancing, so conversation and hearing might be harder.

You may want to ask people to simply think about the questions and reflect on their answers for a while.

If it is a virtual gathering on zoom you can separate into breakout groups and give each group a set of questions to discuss. Or ask the same question to the whole group.

How to use the Cards

Option A.

Scatter the cards on the ground or table with the writing facing upwards. Ask the group to look at the words on the cards and pick a card that speaks to them. Take it in turn to share a story from your own experience based on the chosen topic and question.

Option B

The questions can be placed on separate slides of a power point. The gathered group can either break into smaller groups or turn to the person next to them to share (in their bubble or socially distanced).

Christmas day is a time that we celebrate as Christians.

What does your Christmas day look like?

Have you ever had an invitation to a celebration or event you were surprised to be invited to?

If yes, what was it? And how did it feel to be invited?

When the disciples gathered they ate fish and shared their experiences of the day. They would also listen to Jesus talking and sharing.

Have you received an invitation to be with other people to talk and listen? If yes, what did you talk about?

What do you think Jesus and the disciples would have spoken about?

The story from Hong Kong Methodist Church shares an experience on Christmas day when a person walked past a group enjoying food together in the street, and they were invited to join in.

Have you ever been invited to a party, picnic or BBQ with people you didn't know, or didn't know very well?

Please tell us about your experience.

The Big Lunch was launched by the Eden Project in 2009. Its aim is to encourage local communities across the UK to stop, gather and host a street party in the first week of June.

If your church ran a Big Lunch for your community, what would your invitation to the community say?

How would you get to know the community around you?

The story of the feeding of the five thousand is in John's Gospel in the Bible. Crowds gathered to listen to Jesus talk. It became late and they were hungry. A boy had five loaves and two fish, which he offered to share. Jesus broke the bread and the fish and they shared it amongst the crowd. And the miracle was everybody shared the food and felt full.

During the pandemic we have not been able to share food in church or outside our homes.

Who will you look to share food with once the pandemic restrictions are lifted?

What food will you have to share and how many people can you feed?

Jesus and the disciples welcomed all when they gathered together. Jesus went to and always invited the people who were not included in things.

What makes you feel welcome at your church or when you go to a party?

Who are the people who are left out in your community ?

How will you make everybody feel welcome?

Suggested Prayers

**Prayers of praise and confession prepared by Barbara Easton,
the Vice-President of the Conference**

Holy and gracious God
Divine mystery, wisdom and truth
You draw us to you in love and gather us
together around your Son

We come to you as a church, together, with
our work and our story.
We come to you as a community, together -
sisters and brothers, siblings, 'watching over
one another in love'
We come to you as ourselves, in this
moment, known and loved within your great
family
We open our lives before you.

Holy and gracious God
God most gracious and most holy

Hear our lament:
For sadnesses that are almost too big to
grasp.
For a world that is not as you created it to be;
For society that is not as you purpose it to be;
For this strange last year, when strangeness
and sadness have sometimes threatened to
overwhelm us.

(Silence)

Hear our confession:
We have struggled to love our neighbour
– and we've sometimes struggled to love
ourselves
We have sought reassurance in the old
wineskins rather than the New Wine
We have shied away from your 'more
excellent way', as ourselves and as your
people in the world
We have turned from the prophetic voice

And so we repent:
We repent of our exclusion and inhospitality;
of making your church a place for some and
not for all
We repent of turning from your prophets, of
watering down your radical call on our lives.
We repent.
We seek your transformation.

Be at peace. Your sins are forgiven.
You are held in love and wrapped in grace.
He who calls you holds you. And he who
holds you sends you, and
Warms your hearts
You are made new again. In the name of
Jesus,

Amen.

Suggested Prayers

Prayers of intercession, prepared by the Methodist International Church Hong Kong

Invitational God,
You spread a table before us and invite us to come.
Come, eat and drink, find refreshment, nourishment and life.
Come sit together with friend and stranger, share your stories, listen and speak, learn and rejoice, laugh and sing.

You spread a table for all, but sometimes we exclude people by our prejudices, by our unwillingness to learn, by our failure to be open to new possibilities, and sometimes unknowingly.

Forgive us and help us to learn from Jesus how to cook fish and welcome the tax collector, the sinner, the outcast, the forgotten, the lost, the foreigner, the widow and the orphan.

Sometimes we want to keep the feast to ourselves, a secret where only the knowing and the known may sit at the table. Behind high walls we sit and eat quietly and politely with friends.

But you, God, burst into the world with a loud cry of jubilee – upending tables of prejudice, greed and division and declaring that this is the day of the Lord's favour; come, eat and drink and rejoice – let streets, avenues and lanes burst with feasting and laughter, let many peoples come together, let their language be one of love, of life.

We pray for all who feel excluded from the table of the Lord, for places of war, division and mistrust. For migrants, and those who feel they have no home, for those in poverty and all who suffer injustice. We pray for those who look at the high walls of the church and feel there is no way in, no place at the table.

Let windows be opened, doors flung wide, tables set up in the streets and sweet-smelling food fill the air with the mouth-watering aroma of welcome, embrace and the love of the invitational God.

Amen

Sermon Outline

Note to preacher: Below you will find reflections, some questions to consider as you form the sermon and a brief comment on the Bible passages. Choose what suits you.



Reflection

Growing God's Church – a reflection from Zimbabwe
From the Revd Sonia Hicks, President of the Conference

Methodist Church Members in Zimbabwe

The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe has set itself the challenge to increase its membership from 130,000 to 200,000 by 2024. It had hoped to reach 200,000 members by this year but then Covid-19 intervened. That is a huge task – to draw more people into the Methodist Church, to gather more people around God's table.

The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe is aware of the challenges it faces to achieve this goal. One of the challenges is the patriarchy, which still limits the contributions of women in the society and in the church. There are 269 active ministers in the Methodist Church and 60 of them are women. This year, a three-day conference was held for the women ministers. They were able to share the challenges they were facing and, together, consider ways of overcoming those challenges. The church leadership recognises that this is a first step but they are anxious that the women ministers will be seen as equally valid; equally called by God.

There is no barrier to women offering themselves as Methodist ministers in Zimbabwe but when the women are fully trained, they discover that acceptance of them is limited. We know that God invites all to share in His provision of love and grace. But sometimes we, by our attitudes, limit how far that invitation is extended.

The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe provided a forum where the women ministers could gather and share their experiences. Who, in your church, might benefit from a similar forum that would empower them? How can we listen more intently to those in the shadows of the Church's life? How can we encourage them to draw nearer?

Reflection

Spreading God's Mat - A Reflection from the Pacific
From James Baghwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches

In many Pacific cultures, rolling out the mat is both the creation of safe and inclusive space and an invitation to share and engage in *koinonia*, fellowship and communion, through

ritual, through the sharing of food and gifts and in deep and compassionate listening and storytelling (*toktok/talanoa*).

The weaving and reweaving of mats, baskets for food and sails for canoes are important practices in our communities and are some of the ways in which we understand God's abundant grace at work in us, the church and the world. Weaving (and reweaving) is a community activity – from the planting of trees whose leaves are used, the harvest and preparation of leaves to the process of weaving the mat or basket. Some are fine and intricately woven, some are plain and functional.



The mat is used for sitting, sleeping, eating, recreation, ceremonies, meetings – it represents both home and community. The basket for food collected, cooked, to be shared and to be received, represents hospitality. The sail represents the journey of a community, through space and time but also through the winds of change – ensuring that the journey is exodus, not exile.

In many civil society and development conversations, in the current climate crisis, the cry for ecological conversion for the sake of the life of this planet, Pacific churches call for a reweaving of the mat, to ensure God's abundant grace is for all people and places, as God's creation.

The reweaving of the ecological mat is to restore the sacred strands of ecology, economy and ecumenicity torn apart by the extractive nature of colonialism and perpetuated today by the neo-colonialism of globalisation and neoliberal economics. Reweaving the mat removes the toxic strands which subvert the sense of *koinonia* of our Pacific communities which value right relationships with God and our human and non-human neighbour.

Reweaving the mat also ensures that the mat continues to grow, to make space for those marginalised, for voices to be heard and ensure everyone is valued, loved and cared for. Reweaving the mat is liberation for the oppressed who cry unto the Lord.

Reweaving the basket ensures that there is enough to be shared with all, equally. Nothing is left out, nothing is held back. We share all that we have in love and reciprocity of the abundance that we ourselves have received. The abundance of love embodied in Jesus the Christ.

Reweaving the sail ensures that the community, journeying together, is led by the Holy Spirit, guiding all through the challenging storms of the winds of change, through the dangerous reefs and into the lagoon of peace – the kingdom of God.

We have no table. But on God's mat, constantly being rewoven, extended and purposed for the abundant life of the whole community of God, all are welcome. Come sit, sing praise, lament, share your story and receive the gifts of love and life as we journey to the kingdom. Together.

James Bhagwan, Minister of the Methodist Church in Fiji. Husband, father, servant of the household of God in the Pacific

Reflection

House of Hope – a reflection from Peru

From Barbara Easton, Vice-President of the Conference

The political and economic crises in Venezuela have caused a migrant crisis in the Americas of a similar scale to the Syrian crisis in the West. Numbers have increased rapidly so that there are now about one million registered migrants in Peru, with maybe another half a million who have arrived unofficially. In the face of these challenges, the Methodist community in Lima responded powerfully, turning one of their churches in the north of the city into the House of Hope. This is a beacon for the community: *'There's always a light on here and brothers and sisters to help this light shine. We have just one job – to serve God.'*

Because of Covid-19, my visit to the House of Hope had to be done over Zoom. It seemed ironic that I could meet vulnerable and displaced people from the comfort and safety of my living room. I was quite surprised that it was senior national church leaders who gave me an online guided tour – they are very involved with this project in a hands-on, sleeves-rolled-up kind of way. The Methodist church in Peru is big in vision but small in size, so running this migrant centre is a significant commitment. People were keen to express their thanks to Methodists in Britain for our support through the World Church Fund.

Because of the time difference, in Peru it was seven o'clock in the morning but folk were up and about enjoying a quick cup of coffee as they got on with their day. Families stay at the centre for around

three months, until they can find their feet and move on. The main residents are women travelling alone with children, as they struggle most to establish new lives. Since the disruption of Covid-19, the church has started providing food to people in need in the wider community – particularly refugees who live on the margins of Peruvian life.

After worship in the chapel I met Carmen. She came to the camera with her teenage daughter. Carmen had managed to find a job as a restaurant manager, but when the pandemic hit the restaurant was closed and she, and her daughter, found themselves back at square one. Talking to me, even though we were thousands of miles apart, she began to cry gently. "When I arrived from Venezuela I was not close to God. But little by little, God has shown me that I am not alone." She now works for the House of Hope, organising the outreach ministry of food and practical care.

I was also privileged to speak with Jose, a lively evangelist who provides a strong presence in the community's worship. "I have been preaching about God's goodness and helping others," he told me, even though he is a refugee, and despite the pandemic. "God will support us and God provides for us. God

is calling us to go out and preach the gospel."

You may wish to show 'The world is my parish' video from Peru, which can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/599401922>



Reflection

The House of Cultures – a reflection from Italy
From Fiona Kendall, a mission partner working with Mediterranean Hope in Italy



“I am the most recent volunteer to arrive into this big family but its warmth immediately blew me away and, as always happens when you are happy, I feel the need to talk about it and share it. For me, an Italian who did not know Sicily, to discover that in a town as beautiful as Scicli there is a place as precious as the House of Cultures has been the most lovely surprise.”

So wrote Alessandra Dubbioso, one of the volunteers currently working at the reception centre set up in Ragusa, Sicily, in 2014 by Mediterranean Hope (MH), the Refugee and Migrant Programme of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy.

The House of Cultures, like its residents, was not always welcome. When MH sought to open a centre to host some of the most vulnerable members of society, thousands of locals signed a petition to express their discontent. It took courage, dialogue and conviction for the project to take flight. These days it hosts around 40 residents at a time: male, female, young, old, all of whom share the vulnerability of having fled their homeland. The House of Cultures cannot guarantee them a future. However, the certainty of a roof over their head, food on the table and all the support needed to provide a real prospect of integration into Italian society, does provide the basis for hope. Just as important is the service which the House provides to the local community as a hub for discussion and events, embedding integration of local and immigrant cultures, hence its name.

Alessandra continues: “As the House of Cultures wakes up, first to open the shutters are the staff who, every morning at around 9.30am, welcome with a smile and a joke the volunteers who come from all over Europe to do their bit.” There were two Germans, two French people, an Italian and six Syrian children – does that sound like the start of a joke to you? Actually, it’s not. This cultural melting pot is one of the things which lights up the House of Cultures. Learning Italian through a multi-national exchange of ideas and stories, and appreciating the traditions and cultures of each person is one of the richest aspects of what the House offers.

Each morning the House’s common room comes to life with the arrival of the children of some of the families who arrive in Italy through MH’s Humanitarian Corridors programme. Each afternoon the House common room is filled with little children from the local primary school, including second-generation children from families from other backgrounds living in Scicli, because scholastic support is part of the ‘Village of Cultures’ project, open to all. In the evenings, at 6.30pm, it’s time for Italian lessons and the House becomes a school for all ages.

This is just a snapshot of life at the House. It’s a snapshot of diversity, of inclusion and of hope.



Some questions for thought:

Reflecting on the Presidential theme, 'God's table: An invitation for all', how can you help the congregation delight in the good news of their acceptance and welcome in Christ?

What does that welcome mean for us?

Think about the context of the congregation. How would you describe it? How might it be viewed by others who are different from you?

Whom does our society exclude? What can we and our churches learn as we endeavour to be a welcoming and inclusive people?

Considering the reflection from Zimbabwe, where do we see bias in our context? How does this undermine the gospel's message of all being equally welcomed and valued? How can our learning and practice enable us to redress power structures? What attitudes cause us to restrict invitations? Consider the questions posed at the close of the Zimbabwe piece.

Considering the reflection from the Pacific, how can we make our tables larger and more inclusive? How can we share our resources more equitably, and how can decision-making be more mutual and collaborative? How can our relationship with God, God's creation,

neighbours we know and do not know, be more beautifully harmonious? How can we be more open to God? How does God's Spirit guide us on a journey of inclusivity (you may wish to reflect on the work of the Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles)?

Considering the reflection from Peru, who is in need in your locality? How is/can the church respond? Who encounters prejudice in our society? How can we show welcome and love, valuing all with mutual respect? How can we counter narratives that exclude, dehumanise or reinforce hierarchy and prejudice? How can we share the good news of Jesus like Jose? How and what can we learn from others about offering a welcome and sharing God's love?

Considering the reflection from Italy, how would you describe our welcome in Christ? How welcoming is our society? Who needs to feel welcomed in your community and how can the church respond to that? What causes some of us to be unwelcoming and what does the gospel speak into those situations and hearts? What can we learn from the eventual involvement in the House of Cultures from a local community that had originally opposed it?

Biblical reflections

The book of Ruth tells a story of forced migration due to hunger and of voluntary migration to enable extended family support. Ruth's foreign ethnicity as a Moabite is stressed heavily in the text. Moabites were excluded from the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy

23:3-4; see also Genesis 19:36-37).

Ruth's is a story of a foreign woman, showing intense loyalty and solidarity (Ruth 1:16-17) whilst seeking survival for herself and her mother-in-law in a hostile, misogynistic world with the

ever-present threat of sexual violence. And yet she is to become the great-grandmother of King David and be named in Jesus's genealogy (Matthew 1:5). Ruth claims her rights (Ruth 2:2-3; see Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, and Deuteronomy 24:19-22) and more (Ruth 2:7; 3:9-12). She demands that Boaz, who had prayed that God spread God's wings of protection over her, make that prayer a reality by spreading his cloak (the same Hebrew word can mean cloak or wing) of protection over her (see Ezekiel 16:8 for the spreading of the cloak as referring to God's taking God's people as a bride).

Boaz protects her, ensures that she is provided for, and ultimately marries her. In Ruth 2:14, he invites her to dip her bread in his wine, a sign of intimacy. Jesus allowed Judas to dip his bread in his bowl (Mark 14:20; see also John 13:26 and Psalm 41:9). That was a sign of intimacy and points to Judas being at Jesus's side at The Last Supper: the place of honour. Jesus's seeking of Judas until the end reveals the beautiful grace he has for us all. The Book of Ruth reveals God as the one under whose wings the foreigner and vulnerable seek refuge (Ruth 2:12; see also Psalms 17:8, 36:7-8, 91:4). God demands that we always offer a welcome (See Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

In 1 Corinthians, St. Paul compares the Church to the body of Christ: In chapter 12:12-26 he speaks of the variety and inclusivity of the Church, as a body is made up of different members. Each member is important; indeed, the seemingly weaker members are indispensable. Not all Christians have the same spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:27-31), and not all are from the same ethnic or social background (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; see also

Galatians 3:28) but all are valuable.

Those disparaged by the community are reminded that they are essential in God's creative plan (1 Corinthians 12:15-17) and those who have adopted a false sense of their own importance (1 Corinthians 11:20-22) are no more essential in God's creative plan than those who are looked down upon (1 Corinthians 12:21-24). God gives greater honour to those thought inferior by others.

In our reading from Luke, we hear a parable in which the kingdom of God is compared to a banquet. In the culture of that time and region, men with social status would invite others of significant rank and influence in order to reinforce their social status: their honour would be confirmed by the honourable guests accepting the invitation. The invited would have been told the date in advance, but not the hour (see Esther 5:7-8 and 6:14). Having accepted the invitation, they greatly insulted and brought social shame upon the host by refusing to come when it was ready.

There is here a partial echo of the valid excuses for not participating in a holy war (Deuteronomy 20:5-7 and 24:5); but the call to God's kingdom feast is too urgent for any excuse to be acceptable. The householder then invites the urban and rural poor (by contrast, one who could afford to buy ten oxen [Luke 14:19] was very well off) and those who would have been considered outsiders due to their bodily ailments (Luke 14:21-23). These are the ones who should have been invited in the first place (Luke 14:12-14); yet, according to writings found at Qumran, they were the groups to be excluded

from the heavenly banquet (see also Leviticus 21:16-21).

Jesus had been invited by one with social standing wishing to enhance his social honour by showing that he could secure Jesus's presence at his table (Luke 14:1), but Jesus tells a parable where the householder chooses social

dishonour by inviting to the meal in his house those who would be shunned by those with social status. There must be no motive of self-interest in our invitations; we must invite the most vulnerable and least valued in society. God's invitation reverses and threatens society's hierarchies.

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