

Advent Offering 2018 2-24 December

Welcome to our pick-and-mix worship resources for Advent Offering 2018. Please choose, use and adapt the elements that will best serve your context. In these Leader's Notes you will find:

1. Notes on our chosen theme 'Overflowing Love' and Bible passages, linking these to Advent and Open Doors, Hull – our featured Mission in Britain project this year.
2. An all-age talk idea.
3. Some suggested written prayers for different parts of your service.
4. Some suggested response questions for reflection.
5. Creative activities and ideas for all ages.
6. Some suggested hymns and songs.
7. Additional thoughts for bringing in Charles Wesley's hymn, "Love divine, all loves excelling"; John Wesley's letter to Hull-born William Wilberforce; or more information and resources on refugees and asylum seekers from the Joint Public Issues Team.



1. Notes on our chosen theme and Bible passages

1.1 Overflowing Love and Advent

- God is love and through the mystery of the Trinity, we see love is not static – not even within the Godhead. It flows, moves and acts; perfectly balancing receiving and giving. It overflowed into creating people for relationship with God and each other, and pursued them again and again to restore this relationship whenever they turned away.
- John 3:16 tells us how God the Father so loved the world that he gave his only Son; love itself moving towards us. Jesus is love *incarnate* – in both the theological sense of God coming and dwelling among us and the idiomatic sense of embodying the very essence, or ultimate, expression of love. Everything Jesus did, and every risk or sacrifice he made originated in, focused on, and flowed out from God's love through incarnation, ministry, teaching, miracles and, ultimately the Cross, Resurrection and promised return. Even holding back from Christ's coming again represents God's love and desire for more people to turn back to God (2 Peter 3:9).
- At Advent, we retrace the time preceding Jesus' birth to better receive his presence with us now; resolving to welcome him among us more fully again. And we look ahead to Jesus' return, preparing for this by allowing our lives to be lovingly unsettled by his example and teaching. As his followers, we too are called to live lives of overflowing love; freely sharing all we have and welcoming others as we were welcomed first.



1.2 Notes on our chosen Bible passages

Philippians 1:3-11 – lead focus (taken from the lectionary readings for 9 December)

- Our theme for Advent Offering is inspired by verse 9, where Paul prays that the Philippian church's "**love may overflow** more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless." Here, love is cited as the foundation of all good action and right living; consistent with Jesus' teaching on the greatest commandment (Luke 10:27) and Paul's other writing (eg 1 Corinthians 13).
- Paul's own story is a living testimony of love freely received and given away:
 - God reached out to this persecutor of Jewish believers in Christ on the road to Damascus. And then, one of the persecuted was sent to proactively welcome Paul as "Brother" (Acts 9:17).
 - Through Paul, the Early Church's mission overflowed beyond the Jewish people to the Gentiles.
 - Paul's heart – reflecting the wider Early Church – was always for those in need. These new believers had become famous for embodying the new commandment Jesus gave them (John 13:35) to love each other (Acts 4:32-37). And when Paul visited the more established apostles, they charged him to "remember the poor", which he said he was already "eager" to do (Galatians 2:10).
 - Paul's love for Christ overflowed into risky missionary journeys, where he repeatedly paid a high cost to extend Jesus' welcome to others. He also continued to overflow with love towards the communities he left behind... leading to a legacy of letters that still minister to generation after generation of believers.
- In this letter, Paul is writing to friends; people he's proud of because they embody the gospel well. It's known as his most joyful and no wonder, because every time he thinks of these people, he delights at how they witness to Christ and support him to do the same. But Paul also prays for further development. Jesus' love is a never ending supply; so he prays for more. He is "confident" (v. 6) that God will complete the work he has begun here, but conversely, he knows that to be "blameless" when Christ returns, they will need to stay dependent on the overflowing love that never runs out; the source and strength of Jesus, ministered to and through them by the Holy Spirit.
- Like Paul and the Philippians, we too must keep receiving love from God in Christ, and pass it on to others through his strength. John Wesley also sought to follow this pattern. His mission and ministry overflowed out from his conversion experience, when he felt his heart "strangely warmed". Inner assurance became an outward call to gather in more.
- If Paul was able to write to Open Doors, Hull today, surely a similar letter to Philippians would arrive with them. He would rejoice in how those serving here reach out to people of all nations; welcome the stranger; and serve the poor and destitute with wise, practical help and constant friendship. But he wouldn't take lightly the cost and deep connection to Christ needed to sustain this remarkable work. He would pray for them and, in all likelihood, he would encourage other churches known to him to support them (as he did in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3); reminding them that we are a body, and each of our missions belong to the whole, because they are all in the name of, and for the person of, Christ.





- Through Advent Offering, with the whole Methodist Connexion, we are invited to stand alongside Open Doors and the many other extraordinary projects supported by the Mission in Britain Fund to recognise their mission as ours. We can celebrate and thank God for their wonderful witness to Christ's love; pray

and give to enable their work to overflow more and more; and gladly receive the challenging invitation their example presents. Will we also welcome the stranger and care for the poor where we are, and with what we have? Will we prioritise the people Jesus says those who know him do in Matthew 25:31-46?

Suggested supporting passages

Zephaniah 3:14-20 (taken from the lectionary readings for 16 December)

- Joy is at the heart of this reading too as the prophet voices a song of celebration at the coming redemption. What could be more welcome news than the Lord our God being "in our midst" (v. 17)? But the first two chapters of Zephaniah's book focus almost entirely on the people's sin and God's impending judgement. When the Lord is in our midst, yes, his love abounds and overflows. But so does his holiness; his setting of everything right so that *everyone* can flourish. Joy and restoration come *after* repentance and forgiveness.
- In verse 14, the prophet voices a message from God that personifies Israel as a woman with a close relationship to God. This is a recurring image in the Old Testament and underlines that God is speaking about communal or institutional, as well as personal, sin. Again and again the prophets reiterate that God is the God of the outcast, as Zephaniah does here in verse 19. God views the mistreatment, or oversight, of the stranger as a sin which nullifies seeming devotion (see Isaiah 58:4-14 and Amos 5:21-24).
- This echoes what Paul experienced and taught: we are called both to receive and to give the welcome and restoration of Jesus' love. Yes, we have something to sing about! But we also have something to share; for such a welcome is not just for us, it is for everyone.
- This Advent, as we rejoice in the redemption Christ has brought, and will more fully bring when he returns, we must also question ourselves whether Jesus – and others – will recognise us as God's people by our resemblance to him: to what extent are we those who "gather the outcast" (v. 19) too?
- The example of Open Doors, Hull can inspire us in our local missions, as well as involve us in theirs. Here is a warm and wide welcome to the stranger. And, given the desperate circumstances of many who come, and the attitude of many in the UK towards asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, this means a warm and wide welcome to the outcast and the vulnerable. As British Red Cross worker, Jayne Mercer says, nothing else in Hull "has the atmosphere this place does". That atmosphere is overflowing love.





Luke 3:7-18 (taken from the lectionary readings for 16 December)

- The person and ministry of John the Baptist is a good reminder of just how unsettling the way of overflowing love and welcome can be!
- The passage says John “proclaimed the good news” (v. 18) but he begins with the kind of curse Jesus reserved for the Pharisees (v. 7). A call to repentance doesn’t always feel like good news. But it is. Repentance sets each of us right with God and others – interpersonally and across society: good living is good news for everyone.
- Different repentance is required from different people:
 - the religious need to shake off complacency and re-examine their lives (v. 7-9)
 - the tax collectors must stop hoarding wealth and share it with those in need instead (v. 12-13)
 - the soldiers should stop using their position to exploit the weak (v. 14).
- It can be easy to distance ourselves from John, his message and the people he was speaking to, or to see him as somehow harsher than Jesus. But verses 16-17 remind us that one is coming who is purer and more powerful still. Jesus’ standards are higher than John’s. And so, perhaps, were John Wesley’s. He said in his sermon On the Dangers of Increasing Riches:
 - *“Do you not know that God entrusted you with that money (all above what buys necessities for your families) to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and, indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind? How can you, how dare you, defraud the Lord, by applying it to any other purpose?”*
- For asylum seekers and refugees, the warm welcome they experience at Open Doors, Hull is immediately recognisable as counter-cultural. It is not what they encounter generally in our society. Here food, clothes, expertise and friendship are shared wholeheartedly. Here love overflows freely in Jesus’ name.

What is the repentance required from each of us this Advent?

Scriptures focused on welcome

You could decide to accompany our lead passage with one or more Scriptures exploring the theme of welcome, rather than using other lectionary readings. The following notes provide a quick guide to some key passages that may be helpful to hold alongside *Overflowing Love* and the example of Open Doors, Hull.

- **Genesis 18:1-18**
Abraham recognises the presence of the Lord when the three strangers visit, and pulls out all the stops of Middle-Eastern hospitality for them. (This account is also referred to in **Hebrews in 13:1-3** as part of strengthening a beautifully voiced call to extend hospitality, which also connects to our overflowing love theme.)
- **Deuteronomy 10:12-22**
The command to welcome the stranger and take care of the poor (or the orphan and widow) is repeated throughout the Pentateuch and Prophets. But this passage is particularly strong, rooting the essence of the law in the heart and its attitude (v. 16), the character of God himself (v. 17-18) and the received experience of God’s people (v. 19).





Overflowing Love

- Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry to outcasts abound and many powerfully demonstrate Jesus' love overflowing and breaking down barriers. But **Luke 10:38-42** also provides an interesting approach, enabling you to additionally reflect on the importance of being present to God and people when we welcome God's – and their – presence among us.
- Jesus' parables of the good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37** and the sheep and goats in **Matthew 25:31-46** voice his most challenging calls to welcome the stranger and reach out with generous, practical help to anyone in need, whatever their background.





2. All-age talk – Welcoming Jesus

You will need: a welcome mat, a globe or world map and a teapot.

- Ask everyone to imagine that someone really exciting is visiting their house. What will they do before that person comes? How about when they have arrived – how will everyone show this person welcome?
 - Invite a couple of people to share their ideas.
 - Summarise that **to give a warm welcome** you should:
 - **prepare the space** your guest will be in by cleaning and tidying up
 - **spend quality time** with your visitor, listening and responding to what they say
 - **look after their physical needs** by being in when they arrive; encouraging them to make themselves at home; serving good food and drink; and making sure they know where your bathroom is.
 - *Lay down the welcome mat.*
 - Explain that Advent isn't just about getting ready to celebrate Christmas. It's about preparing to welcome Jesus more fully into our hearts and lives.
- To do this we:
- **prepare more room** by clearing out anything getting in the way of us spending time with God, or creating a nasty mess in the corner
 - **spend quality time** listening closely to what Jesus has to say and respond by changing things to make him feel more at home; this can be tricky because Jesus can be quite an unusual and disruptive guest
 - **welcome him physically** by welcoming people who don't have friends here, or who need practical help because this is how he said he likes to be welcomed.
- Some people who've become experts at this are the team at Open Doors in Hull:
 - Open Doors is based at a Methodist Church. When you arrive it looks nice but ordinary. But when you go in it's amazing!
 - *Hold up the world globe or map and then place it on the welcome mat.*
 - Every week, staff and volunteers at Open Doors welcome hundreds of people from more than 60 different nationalities around the world, who have come to the UK because it wasn't safe to stay where they were born.
 - Some of these people have almost nothing and really need a warm place with good food, drink and new clothes or some emergency money. And because they're new to Britain, lots of them need advice, English lessons or help with filling out forms. All of them need fun times with other people too, especially if they're lonely.
 - Open Doors gives them all these things, starting with welcoming each one as warmly as if they were the most important person in the world – welcoming them as if they were Jesus.
 - Our Advent Offering service today gives us the opportunity to pray for, and give money to help Open Doors and other brilliant Mission in Britain projects. It also gives us a chance to think about how we welcome others too.





- *Hold up the teapot, then place this next to the globe or map on the welcome mat.*
- Explain that a teapot is one of the best symbols of a good British welcome! It's also a good picture for what today's reading from the Bible is saying:
 - In it, Paul is writing to a church in Philippi (now in modern Greece) and praying for the Christians there to overflow with love more and more; for them to keep being filled up with Jesus' love and to keep pouring it out.
 - Just like a good teapot has its dregs cleared out, and is re-filled again and again with fresh tea and clean, hot water, so it can be shared out into cup after cup for everyone; so our lives need to be cleared out, and re-filled with Christ's warm, welcoming love to give away to others who really need it.





3. Suggested prayers

Use or adapt these prayers for different parts of your service.

A gathering prayer

Leader: We gather today because we are welcome;
for our Lord left perfection to find us.

All: Thank you for welcoming us into your presence, Lord.

Leader: We gather to enjoy God's presence together for we are no longer strangers;
we have been welcomed as friends by his overflowing love.

All: Thank you for calling us friends, Lord.

Leader: We gather to strengthen our resolve to welcome others into God's ever-expanding
fellowship;
we seek to learn to love more like him who will one day come again.

**All: We ask you to teach us and change us Lord Jesus,
Love incarnate, Love risen, Love returning as King.**

A prayer of adoration and thanks

"Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down."
How can we find words to praise you justly;
to trace even a fraction of your loving renown?

But Lord you don't ask for beautiful phrases
or adoration that matches heaven's above,
instead you call for humble-hearted submission
and lives overflowing with welcoming love.

So we voice this prayer in thanks for your coming,
and praise you for promising to come once again,
our phrases fall far short, but thank you for loving us,
for welcoming us by the generous grace of your name. **Amen.**





A prayer of confession

Lord Jesus, Love incarnate,
we confess how quickly we forget
what you gave up for us and how far you went
to welcome us back into fellowship with God.
Help us to remember and honour the price you paid
to restore your presence to us,
and lead us to prepare for your return
by making more room for you and your priorities
in our hearts and the actions we take in our lives.

Lord Jesus, Love incarnate,
we confess how easily we make excuses;
choosing not to share or avoiding the inconvenience
of welcoming outsiders in and helping those in need.
Fill us to overflowing with love that readily
pays the price of restoring provision to all.
Lead us to prepare for your return
by making more room for others and their needs
in our hearts and the actions we take in our lives. **Amen.**

A prayer for the work of Open Doors, Hull

Lord Jesus, we come to you today to share your joy in Open Doors.
Thank you for the way this project overflows with your love
and ministers your heart's welcome to call strangers as friends.

Strengthen your precious friends here, Lord,
as they continue to do your work in your name.

Increase your supply of every good gift to them
so they can keep welcoming the world on their doorstep.

Keep helping them in every moment and task they undertake
to translate love into practical support and make connections
that can be understood and received by every person
who walks through Open Doors in need of help.

Amen.





All-age prayers of intercession

You will need: a welcome mat, a teapot, a globe or world map, an offering basket and ideally four different people to lead, so the group praying gradually widens out (although one person can read all the sections outlined below if you would prefer).

The first person leading prayer begins by laying down the welcome mat in front of them:

Thank you Lord Jesus for loving us so much that you left heaven and came down to live among us. Thank you that you lived and died pure love to set everything right between us and God. Thank you that because of you we are welcome in God's presence.

The first person steps on to the welcome mat in front of them and prays:

This Advent, help us to take more steps closer towards you, Lord; to better welcome your presence with us, and also to welcome the things you want to change in us to make us more like you, even when that's hard to do.

The second person now brings up the teapot and prays:

Help us to remember Lord Jesus that you fill us up with love and good gifts so we can share these with others who are in need. Thank you for the staff and volunteers at Open Doors and all the ways they pour out your love for people in need across Hull, who come from all over the world.

Please keep filling staff at Open Doors with more and more love and good gifts to keep overflowing even more; and help them to remember to keep coming back to you for top-ups!

The third person brings up the globe or world map and prays:

Lord Jesus we lift before you today every person living in the UK who comes from somewhere else in the world, especially those who have had to leave their countries because life was frightening. We pray for peace and good change in the countries they used to call home and in the UK too, so it can be a better, more welcoming home for them.

Please give your church here a 'love that overflows' beyond just those people we know. Help us to love others more like you have loved us, welcoming each one as a friend.

The last person now brings up the offering basket or plate and prays:

Lord Jesus we come before you with ourselves and the good gifts you have given us. Help us to offer them back to you. Help us to overflow with love to other people too. Show us in our hearts how you are asking each of us to support Open Doors and Mission in Britain.

We know we need your help to love people better, so fill us up to overflowing and pour us out wherever and however you want. **Amen.**





A prayer for all asylum seekers and refugees in the UK today

Leader: Thank you Lord that you know every story,
were present on every journey,
understand every past trauma
and see all present pain and need
held in the hearts of those living among us,
asking for refuge from dangers
in the places they used to call home.
Thank you that you never stop caring and acting on their behalf.

**All: Lord, speed your love to the strangers among us,
overflow your welcome to them through us.**

Leader: We pray for each asylum seeker anxious about their application or appeal,
all who are struggling to make ends meet while they wait for news;
for every refugee left longing for family and those who left family behind as their price for safety.
We pray for each one confused by our culture or language;
for any feeling unwelcome, afraid or alone.
We plead for all who feel overwhelmed by our systems,
especially where need is met with distrust.

**All: Lord, speed your love to the strangers among us,
overflow your welcome to them through us.**

Leader: We long for a better welcome for all who come to our shores,
for a just and fair process, free of cynical suspicion;
for decisions rooted in love and delivered with kind respect,
which recognise the dignity of each precious individual.
We pray you would help us fight for this justice
and be part of the welcome our prayers petition you for,
for your sake Lord, whose presence we know and bless
when we recognise you in each asylum seeker and every refugee.

**All: Lord, speed your love to the strangers among us,
overflow your welcome to them through us.**





A personal prayer

Lord Jesus, love incarnate,
how can I ever thank you enough
for the price you paid
to welcome me into relationship with you?
Lord Jesus, love incarnate,
help me remember that you've already told me
you are blessed when I seek to welcome the stranger
and overflow with your love to those in need too. **Amen.**

A special offertory prayer for this year's Advent Offering

You could decide to use empty teapots with their lids taken off in place of your normal offering baskets or plates, as a joy-filled, celebratory way to help people tangibly connect with being part of giving welcome.

Lord Jesus Christ,
love incarnate and overflowing,
thank you for moving in, through and beyond us
by your Spirit.

Help us to give, freely, as we have received.
Make us instruments of your overflowing love.

Receive these gifts, which come from you and which we return to you.
May they be used in the service of your kingdom;
may they be transformed into practical help and love
that strangers may be welcomed as friends
in the extraordinary generosity of your name. **Amen.**





A sending prayer inspired by Philippians 1:3-11 and the work of Open Doors, Hull

Lord Jesus, love incarnate,
fill us and send us out in the power of your Spirit
that we too may overflow more and more with your love
for the outsider, the outcast, the vulnerable and the refugee.
Grow our knowledge and insight to determine what is best
so that we may be pure and blameless
on the day of your return
and so we may produce an abundant harvest of righteousness,
a warm and wide blessing of welcome to others,
in reflection of the extraordinary generosity of your name.
Amen.

An all-age sending prayer

Lord make us like your little teapots,
whether we're short or tall,
old or young, thin or stout!
Fill us up with your kind welcome
and move us to where you want us
so we can pour your love out!
Amen!





4. Suggested response questions for reflection

There is so much in our Overflowing Love theme, Bible passages and stories from Open Doors, Hull that you could leave them to speak for themselves. But you might want to give people some breathing space to consciously think about how they want to respond. If so, you could share, print or project these questions after the sermon, leaving a few moments of quiet for people to consider them.

1. Where do you feel in need of receiving love – from God and/or others – this Advent?
more and more with his love to those who need welcoming or other forms of practical help?
2. Which areas of your life do you need to welcome Jesus' lovingly unsettling presence into?
3. Where might Jesus be prompting you to overflow
4. How do you want to support Open Doors, Hull's work to provide a warm welcome, and the wider work of Mission in Britain, by praying and/or giving through Advent Offering this year?

5. Creative ideas for responding in prayer

You could use any of these ideas corporately, providing the relevant, pre-prepared items on/under each person's seat before the service or handing them round. Or, you could adapt one or more of them into prayer stations.

Start with the heart

Before the service: make or buy enough paper, card or fabric heart shapes for everyone in your congregation to have one. Using a hole punch, or a needle and thread, attach a small length of ribbon or string to each one, so it can hang as a simple Christmas decoration.

- Encourage everyone to hold their heart between their closed hands and to thank God for the gift of Jesus to us – love incarnate, flowing out to us, coming to find us, dwelling with us and inviting us into relationship with God.
- Now ask everyone to hold the heart against their own. Suggest they ask God to fill their own heart with more of Jesus' love, and to strengthen them to keep giving love away so others freely receive from him.
- Next, suggest everyone holds their heart in their outstretched, cupped hands. Invite them to surrender their hearts to serve others in love, holding the hearts and lives of others as carefully as they would want their own to be treated; through their prayers and giving towards Mission in Britain, and through their own embodiment of overflowing love in welcome and service to people in need wherever they are.
- Finally, invite everyone to take their hearts home and hang them on their Christmas trees, or somewhere else where they will see them each day for the rest of Advent and over Christmas too. Challenge them to use these hearts as reminders, and every time they see them, to offer a short prayer for more and more love to reach and overflow out from Maryam, everyone at Open Doors, Hull and the whole work of Mission in Britain.





Overflowing prayers

You will need: enough paper cups for everyone in your congregation to have one; several jugs full of water (enough to fill everyone's cup) and a corresponding number of volunteers; a large container.

- Depending on the size and nature of your congregation, decide whether the volunteers with the jugs of water will move around the church filling people's cups, or whether they will essentially stand as 'stations' to which people come. (The latter will be especially meaningful.)
- As people are having their cups filled and/or sitting waiting with their cups already filled, invite them to thank God in their hearts for his overflowing love given to each one of us through Jesus Christ coming to find us and pouring out his life for us.
- When everyone has water in their cup, invite them to look at it and all the cups filled with water held by others around them. Encourage everyone to

thank God for the way God fills and equips each and every member of the Body to carry love and pour it out in different ways.

- Next, invite everyone to take a sip of the water they are holding and to imagine the many cups of tea and other drinks being made and served to those in need of welcome at Open Doors, Hull. Encourage them to give thanks for every cup offered as a symbol of the generous welcome shared by this project and to pray for God's blessing of continuous supply to the staff and volunteers here so that they can keep overflowing God's love in tangible ways.
- Finally, if they are happy to do so, invite everyone to come forward and pour out the contents of their cup into the large container at the front of church, suggesting they do so as a symbolic prayer of their heart and commitment to play their part in supporting the wider work of Mission in Britain.

Love letter prayers

You will need: a pen and a Christmas card per person and a large envelope.

- Explain that just as Paul prayed for, and sent his prayers as encouragement to the Philippian church, and Wesley followed suit for Wilberforce, today you are all going to do the same for Open Doors, Hull – our Mission in Britain focus project this year.
- Show the congregation the big envelope you will be using to send off their encouraging prayers to Hull.
- Invite people to write a short prayer of celebration,

thanks or petition to God for the staff, volunteers and/or people coming to Open Doors, Hull in their Christmas card.

- Collect these up as an offering of prayer and/or invite people to bring them forward, depending on what works best for your congregation, until you have a bulging envelope full of prayers. Pray over this and over the encouragement it will be when it is received by Open Doors, as well as God.





Teapot prayers

You will need: a welcome mat, a globe or world map, enough pencils or pens and paper teapot shapes for everyone to have at least one each.

- Place the welcome mat and globe at the front or side of church where everyone can see it.
- Give everyone a teapot shape and a pen or pencil and encourage them to write on it a simple prayer, or words or a picture, for your church – and the whole Methodist Church – to give an even better welcome to those beyond our faith community, and especially to people seeking refuge in the UK from other countries.
- Invite everyone who's happy to do so to bring their teapot up and place it on or near the welcome mat with the globe, as a sign that they will play their part in this – through prayer, giving and welcoming others.

6. Suggested songs and hymns from *Singing the Faith (StF)*

A new commandment I give unto you (StF 242)
A rich young man came seeking (StF 243)
Blest are the pure in heart (StF 244)
Call us to be your compassion (StF 413)
Come, let us sing of a wonderful love (StF 443)
God is love: his the care (StF 403)
God of justice, Saviour to all (StF 699)
He came to earth in poverty (StF 246)
Hills of the north, rejoice (StF 172)
Jesus Christ is waiting (StF 251)
Kneels at the feet of his friends (StF 249)
Let us build a house where love can dwell (StF 409)

Long ago, prophets knew (StF 178)
Love came down at Christmas (StF 210)
Love divine, all loves excelling (StF 503)
On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry (StF 182)
Praise to God who clears the way (StF 183)
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! (StF 186)
The Church of Christ, in every age (StF 415)
The kingdom of God (StF 255)
There's a wideness in God's mercy (StF 416)
We have nothing to give (StF 670)
When I needed a neighbour (StF 256)
Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master? (StF 672)





7. Additional thoughts, ideas, links and resources

Love divine, all loves excelling

Charles Wesley's powerful hymn (*StF* 503) picks up on many of the themes of our lead passage, Philippians 1:3-11, and so you may wish to prioritise including it in your service.

You could also consider creating some space in the service not only to sing this hymn, but to have some quiet reflection time around its words, inviting people

to read them slowly, and praying through the hymn line by line before singing it. Alternatively, you could have it sung – or play a recording of it being sung – whilst people look at the response questions, or are simply given time to prayerfully consider their actions following all they have heard, before you turn to intercession and/or the offering.

Hull, Wesley and Wilberforce

Our focus project, Open Doors is located in the UK's current city of culture; an honour that will last until Coventry takes over in 2021. You might wish to reflect on the celebration of different cultures gathered together that Open Doors makes possible.

Hull was visited multiple times by John Wesley and was the hometown of William Wilberforce, himself encouraged by Wesley in his work to abolish slavery. Wesley's last letter, written aged 88 just six days before his death in 1791 was to the politician. In it he said:

“Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? O be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.”

We do not fully know just how instrumental this letter of encouragement, and the prayer that surely accompanied it, was in spurring Wilberforce to persist in his vital work. Just like Paul and the Philippians, this letter overflowed with love, prayer and exhortation that inspired more knowledge and insight in another part of Christ's Body.

Open Doors, Hull carries on Wilberforce's legacy of championing the value of every person made in the image of God, and welcoming strangers from around the world to live in Hull with dignity and love.

Who knows what difference our prayer, encouragement and support of Open Doors – and other similar Mission in Britain projects – will make to individual lives and even to the heart and spirit not just of our Church, but of our nation?





Further helpful resources and campaign information

It may be that, after hearing some of the stories from Open Doors, Hull and considering the themes of overflowing love and welcoming strangers in need raised by Advent Offering this year, you and your church might want to consider learning more, and perhaps campaigning, about the wider issues surrounding asylum seekers and refugees in the UK today.

If so, the Joint Public Issues Team has some excellent resources available at:

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/asylum-and-migration/

These also include the brilliant *A Very British Nativity* film, which imagines Mary and Joseph arriving in the UK.

Find this and more at: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/averybritishnativity/ or

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/prepare-ye-the-way/

