

Saving slum children's lives by washing hands in clean water



Service outline

Practical Action is delighted to offer these worship resources to your church family. It is a chance to focus on fellowship with some of the poorest people across the globe, and the ways they can transform their lives. The ideas are suitable for all ages, and can be adapted for particular audiences. If your church has projection facilities, you can find videos and slides which have more information on the theme in this sheet, and which will help with your service, at www.practicalaction.org/churchservices

Note that this service is especially suitable during Advent, as a message of God's love coming into the world, and also works Father's Day, about the value of offering, and accepting, practical help.

Introduction to this service

It is Jesus' primary command to us, that we should love God, and each other, and ourselves, but sometimes we can lose sight of what that actually means. [If service held in Advent: In this Advent time, as we approach the birth of our Saviour], let us take lessons from far-away slums, and use them to re-dedicate ourselves to demonstrating God's love in the world. After all, the Church is rooted in action, in offering help and salvation to those who need it most, and we are called to carry

that love into our families, our workplaces, and our communities. Ask one of the children to help you light a candle; if Advent, then an Advent candle. The prophet Isaiah said, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined." Today, we will promise to take the light of Christ into the world, even as He brings his light to us (at Advent, add, 'on our (number) Advent Sunday').





Welcome and explanation

Welcome the congregation and explain that this is a service with a special focus on how love triumphs. Explain that you will be using the example of Practical Action, and their work in the slums of Kenya, to explore what happens when we act on love as a verb, as a 'doing' word.

There is a town in western Kenya called Kisumu, where a huge, and growing, slum is home to thousands of families. There is no clean water for children to wash their hands after using the pit latrines or before eating, so diseases like cholera are rife. Diarrhoea in particular is a real problem: repeated bouts in childhood change the gut wall so nutrients can never be fully absorbed.

As a result, in Kisumu, 1 child in 4 suffers stunted growth, due to malnutrition. There is a solution: a slum-wide campaign to install proper water points, and community toilets, and crucially, a programme to get everyone washing their hands. Today we will learn more about that, and we will show that love is a verb by taking a collection / making a donation which will help bring the clean water in to the heart of Kisumu's slums, and halt the deadly spread of diarrhoea.



Opening prayer

The Church of England Collect.

God our Father, as we gather in Your house, let us make space around Your table for all our brothers and sisters. Let the love that we show stand as Your witness in the world, and our deeds shine out like a beacon in the darkness. If Love is a verb, if Love is a doing word, then let our acts of kindness and compassion make Thy Kingdom come, right here and now, into our needful world. In the name of Your Son, whose joyful coming brings light into the world, Amen.

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Opening song suggestions

Jesus Shall Reign Where'er The Sun – Isaac Watts

O Come, O Come Emmanuel – traditional

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Confession

Loving God, we are sorry for when we have failed to be kind to our friends, our neighbours, and to strangers. For when we have fallen far short of the example of Your son, Jesus. For when we haven't even tried, but instead have taken the easier path, of putting ourselves first. We know if we ask Your forgiveness, it shall be given unto us, and for this, we are truly thankful. By our compassionate actions to our brothers and sisters, help us to light a candle in the darkness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Bible reading

Isaiah 2:2-5

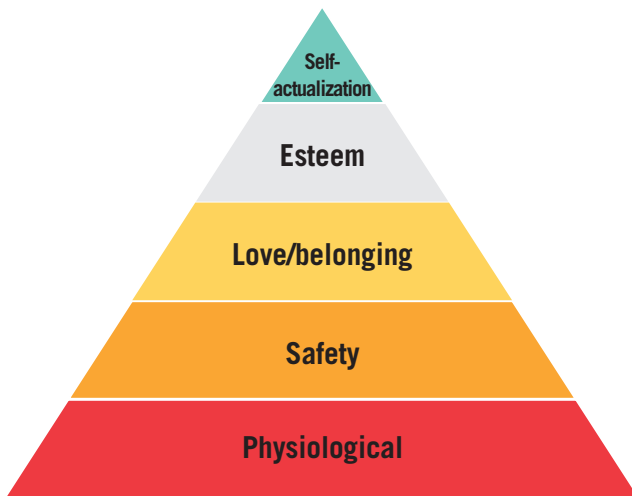
John 12:1-8

Romans 2:6-11

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Talk

Ask the congregation: what do people need to live happy lives? Put the replies on post-it notes, and put them onto Abraham Maslow's classic 'Hierarchy of Needs' triangle.



Maslow thought that only when a lower 'level' of needs was met did the one above it become pressing. So, your first priority is physical needs like food, water, and air. Then when you have these, you focus on security from harm, then social belonging, self-confidence, and finally, transcendence through altruism and spirituality. But does this hierarchy see every man (and woman) as an island? Does it match our experience of needing and receiving God's love, and of getting, or giving, help from other people? There is no right or wrong answer, but you can expect some of the congregation to think that Maslow's hierarchy doesn't account for our need for Christian fellowship.

The reading from Isaiah shows what the world will look like, when we put God first in our hearts, and treat each other as His equal children. Maybe this should be our most basic need! The amazing thing is that because love is His foremost gift to us, if we show that love to each other, then we hasten the Kingdom which Isaiah describes.

In the second reading, Jesus has his feet anointed by Mary, and Judas scolds her for wasting money. Christ's response has often been mis-appropriated by those wanting to blame the poor for their own situation. There is a lovely story about the writer Kurt Vonnegut who was asked to preach, and chose Jesus' reply to Judas for his sermon. He contrasted it with the mercifulness of the Sermon on the Mount, and suggested:

"Perhaps a little something has been lost in translation... as a Christ-worshipping agnostic, I have seen so much un-Christian impatience with the poor encouraged by the quotation, "For the poor always ye have with you."...If Jesus did say that, it is a divine, Christian, black joke, well suited to the occasion. It says everything about hypocrisy and nothing about the poor. It allows Jesus to remain civil to Judas, but to chide him for his hypocrisy: 'Judas, don't worry about it. There will still be plenty of poor people left long after I'm gone.'"

Christ is right. The poor are still with us. Practical Action is working in the slums of Kisumu, with women like Risper, and her daughter Phelisa (pictured below). When she was just 3 months old, Phelisa almost died from diarrhoea which left her dehydrated and dangerously underweight. Although she recovered, she now has a greater risk of malnutrition, as her body has been changed by her illness. Practical Action is installing water points, and community toilets, and running a campaign to get everyone in the slums washing their hands with the clean water, to save children like Phelisa.

[Advent / Now] is a good time to reflect on the acts we can take to bring light to the darkness, and to prepare the way for Christ. If love is a doing word, what can we do to stop suffering, in far away places like Kisumu, and on our own doorstep? We can pray, we can empathise, and we can perform simple acts of charity at home, and for those living overseas. As the final reading from Romans tells us, our reward will be to live in God's eternal kingdom, which by these deeds, we are helping to build.



Song/hymn suggestions

When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there? - Sydney Carter

Lo! He comes, with clouds descending - Charles Wesley

What a friend we have in Jesus - Joseph Medlicott Scriven

Activities

- If your church has a CD player, play one of the following modern songs, which treat love as a verb, and discuss any feelings or thoughts they provoke:
 - Massive Attack - Teardrop
 - John Mayer - Love is a Verb
 - Joan Osborne - What If God Was One Of Us
- Write out some human needs on post-it notes and then group them, for example into basic or nice-to-have. Which ones can't be met without other people?
- Get bowls of warm water and towels, and ask people to get in pairs and wash each other's hands, and to pray for each other, while doing it.
- Collect promises of favours, for example car washing, or an hour's gardening, or baking a cake, or arranging flowers. Then hold a 'promises auction' and give the proceeds to Practical Action.

Prayers of intercession

Dear Lord, we pray for the wellbeing of people living in slums all over the world, that they may receive clean water and sanitation. We pray for the sick and the lonely, for those who suffer in wars and those who grieve, for those known to us by name, and those known only unto You. Give us the grace to act in Your name, and by doing so, to light a candle which drives back the darkness.

So please repeat after me each line of this prayer by Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

Goodness is stronger than evil,

Love is stronger than hate.

Light is stronger than darkness,

Life is stronger than death.

Victory is ours,

Through Him who loves us.

Amen.

Closing song suggestions

Come, thou long expected Jesus! Born to set thy people free - Charles Wesley

Thou, Whose Almighty Word - John Marriott

Blessing

*The economist Fritz Schumacher, who founded the charity Practical Action, said in his book 'Small is Beautiful', "**We still have to learn how to live peacefully, not only with our fellow men but also with nature and, above all, with that Higher Power which has made nature and has made us; for, assuredly, we have not come about by accident and certainly have not made ourselves.**"*

*As we go forth into the world, let us live in harmony with all of Your creation, and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, **Amen.***

Thank you for sharing Practical Action's service ideas with your church. We are an international charity which uses technology to challenge poverty in some of the world's poorest countries. We help men and women to find practical solutions to the hardships they face, without damaging the world.