

Opening the circle – Opening worship

Good morning and welcome.

We are going to make a start to our programme by spending some time singing, praying and connecting with each other and opening ourselves up to the presence of God, so I invite you to rise – either in body or in Spirit

Call to worship:

Lead: Encircling God

You gather us all into You

You encircle and enfold

All that You have made

In Your great plan of diversity

**Sung response: Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.
Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.**

Psalm 104 Redux (from 'Psalms Redux: Poetry and Prayers' by Carla Grosch-Miller)

Praise God, oh my soul.

The wonder of all creation calls forth praise.

The marvel of the heavens,

stars flung into space by night,

cotton candy clouds on a canvas of blue by day,

source of light and life, rain and snow,

wind whipping, cleansing, making music among the trees.

The solidity and strength of the earth,

majesty of mountains,

verdance of valleys,

dancing deserts and singing streams,

a structure to support renewal and re-creation

day by day, year to year.

**Sung response: Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.
Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.**

All are at home in creation,
from the microbe and the mite
to the elephant and the blue whale.
Trees shelter birds,
seas sustain fish,
every animal has a dwelling place.
Streams tumble down hillsides
and springs bubble up from below;
grasses emerge from soil and fruit from trees.
Watered and fed, we flourish.

The rhythm of days and seasons
orders our work and our rest,
cradling our creativity.

**Sung response: Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.
Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.**

Yet still we struggle.
Made in your image,
we fashion a world in freedom –
for good and for ill.
Our generosity pales;
our compassion fails.
In the midst of earth's beauty and bounty,
not all have enough to eat,
not all live in safety and security.

We look to you for life
and for the goodness in our souls.
Renew us to wonder.
Lift our eyes to marvel again
at all that you have made.
Whisper our name Beloved –
that we might remember
who we are
and to whom we belong.
Raise us to what we can be,
a source of blessing to all the earth,
friends of creation and bearers of hope.
Then you may rejoice in us,
as we rejoice in you.

**Sung response: Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.
Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.**

I will sing of your goodness all my days.
I will seek to magnify you in my being
as long as I shall live.
At the end, I shall abandon myself
entirely into your kind hands,
and my praise shall be complete.

Sung response: Lord we will worship. Lord we will worship.

Continue into full song – 'AS WE GATHER' by Joel Payne

https://www.resoundworship.org/song/as_we_gather_whatever_we_do

Prayer:

There are many prayers from our Celtic heritage that tie in with our theme of 'Opening the Circle'; and the prayer we are going to say together now is based on a type of Celtic prayer called a Caim Prayer (or encircling prayer) - which was used to surround oneself with blessing.

As we pray it, we are encouraged to think about what is it that we are really praying for?

All: Draw a circle around us O God, keep us from harm and grant us protection

Lead: But, what do we truly we need protected from?

Sometimes we need protected from ourselves,
sometimes our reactions or things that we say
can be harmful to ourselves even before they affect others.

Right now it is difficult to know what to be more scared of,
the media tells us one story and someone else tells us another
and yet more people say it's fake news.

God, keep us open,
open to all that is life giving,
open to the gift of vulnerability and receiving from others,
open to all those who are different from us,
open to the stranger in our midst (who is often the guise of Christ).

Help us to connect the dots of our thinking

ALL: Open the circle, O God

All: Draw a circle around us O God, keep us from darkness and grant us light

Lead: But, keep us open to the idea that maybe,
just maybe the dark isn't all bad.

After all, there is necessary work to be done there.
The greening and growing,
like seeds planted in the dark, rich fertile soil,
Like the Lenten journeys many of us are on even now.

Help us God, not to be too hasty in deciding what is good or bad
Help us not to be too certain about who is in or out,
but, help us to think critically and carefully and deeply
as we draw circles around what is good , or right, or true

ALL: Open the circle, O God

All: Draw a circle around us O God, keep us from turmoil and grant us peace

Lead: But, sometimes we need a bit of disorder,
something or someone to come in and shake things up a bit.
Forgive us for when we have tried to domestic Your Holy Spirit,
To make Your will fit into the shape of our firm ideas.

Help us to hear the voices from the margins,
Help us to look in the right places for where Your work is being done,
Help us to discern the difference between the turbulence of our own busyness
and the wind of Your Holy Spirit.
Help us to deepen our faith, that You are to be found out there,
widen our sphere of influence

ALL: Open the circle, O God

All: Draw a circle around me O God, keep me from despair and grant me hope

Lead: Yet, keep me open to the reality of life,
Do not close me off to the oppression of others
Do not desensitise me and make me blind to need of those around me,
Do not make me deaf to the far off cry of those that my actions affect through my
spending, my eating, my travelling.

Sometimes we need to face harsh reality
and face the despair of the worst case scenario
before we turn to You, the deep well of Living Water
before we take action, and work for justice
As we look towards the future and the shape of things to come
Keep us open to possibility and to the hope that things can change

ALL: Open the circle, O God. AMEN

CONVERSATION

You are invited to have a brief conversation with those around you –
If you haven't introduced yourselves to those around you take a moment to do that and
then I invite you to have a brief conversation about –

- **What drew you here today?**

**SONG – LET US BUILD A HOUSE WHERE LOVE CAN DWELL/ALL ARE WELCOME IN
THIS PLACE <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>**

Setting the scene for the whole day

Reflection:

Inclusive, open to all, all in, all are welcome in this place, all age, access all areas, a
church for all people –where everyone is welcome, where everyone can belong,
but, who gets to decide what belonging really means?

Who gets to set the bar?

Who says you're in or you're out?

Who really decides who remains and who leaves?

Who is most important?

Who is the most powerful?

Is it those with the loudest voice?

The ones who are the right shape, or right colour, or right age, or from the right place, or say the right things, that believe the right way, that wear the right clothes, that behave the right way?

Who gets to decide?

Who gets to decide what we say, or sing, or do?

Where we sit and on what type of seats?

Who gets to tell their story, who gets to be seen, who gets to be heard?

Is it those with the microphones or those with the dominant voice?

The king or queen of the castle, Lord or lady of the manor, or is it the Pharisee, or the Poor widow, the orphan or the chosen one, the long serving or the new-comer, the ones on the fringes or the stalwart, the prodigals or the older brothers?

We are all equal before God... but what does that really mean?

What does it really mean to belong?

What does it really mean to be included? To be in?

What does it really look like?

What shape is it?

Comment and hopes for the day:

Today we are going to hear stories of people's experiences of building community, sharing power, creating together and imagining spaces where all are truly welcome- regardless of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, socio- economic background, education, ability, means or gifting.

We will hear stories, reflect and consider together how theology and practice can shape each other, live in tension and are ultimately major factors to inclusion or exclusion.

We are going to hear the story of Auchterarder Parish Church and then reflect on our own and in our groups as we consider - how we might engage in communal discernment around ideas of who we are and how God is calling us to connect as community.

We are going to hear the story of Hot Chocolate and then reflect on our own and in our groups as we consider - how we might empower faith formation and develop worship practice with those outside recognisable church structures.

We are going to hear the story of Livingston United Church and then reflect on our own and in our groups as we consider - how we might move from the paradigm of 'doing for' to 'doing with'.

We are going to hear our own and each other's thoughts, insights and stories,
We are going to reflect on what has imprinted on us from hearing stories, questions and unformed thoughts

We are going to consider - how we might co-create the shared spaces and practices needed for all to flourish.

So,
we invite you to go deep into yourself while stepping into others stories,
to be courageous yet vulnerable,
to be open to new possibilities and ancient truths.

We invite you to actively listen to each other,
to speak openly and honestly,
while being respectful and compassionate

we invite you to be curious and ask generous questions
and to be patient and give space to other voices, to be brave enough to wonder
and be open to possibility

We invite you to be open
to God who goes before us
to lead us into shared spaces
All: Give us courage

We invite you to be open

To God who goes behind us to protect us
from prejudice and the weaponising of our own words against us

All: Give us grace

We invite you to be open

To God who goes beneath us to support and sustain us
in our wondering and wandering

All: Give us hope

We invite you to be open

To God who goes beside us to befriend us
as we think deeply and challenge each other and our preconceived ideas

All: Give us courage

We invite you to be open to possibility

We invite you to be honest about being afraid and uncomfortable

We invite you to be open to and aware of the presence of God, the love of Christ and the
guiding of the Holy Spirit -

**All: May the blessing and presence of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
Holy Trinity,
Unbroken Circle of Love,
fall down upon us and on all creation,
this day and for the future to come. AMEN**

Opening the Circle – Closing prayer

Based on the 'Seven Directions, for intercessions - a prayer by David Adam'

~Facing the east the place of the dawn~

Praise to You, O God, for the gift of this day.
Bless all who are rejoicing in the newness of life today:
All who are meeting new people
and facing new opportunities and challenges:

Bless all those who are breaking new ground:
Creatives, thought leaders, culture-creators,
Justice seekers and paradigm shifters,
pioneers, trailblazers, gate openers and early adopters.
Bless all those who lead and those that follow,
Those that champion and shine spotlights,
Those that take the first step,
Those that do the heavy lifting,
Those that speak out, speak up
And those who just say something!
Blessed are You, God of yesterday, today and tomorrow -
May we know that You are with each of us
In all our new beginnings,
today and always.

~Facing the south, the direction of noon and the fullness of the day~

Blessed are You, Living God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all there is.
Bless all who are being disempowered
and who are inspiring and empowering others
Bless all who need a bit of inspiration.

Bless all those on the edges, the fringes, and the easy to ignore places.
Bless all those who are in the majority, those in the minority
and all those who don't really know where they fit.
Bless all those who leave,
Bless all those who remain,
Bless us all with places to belong.
May we know the fullness of life in our relationships with one another
And with You enveloping God.
May we all know Your care
in all that unfolds before us.

~Facing the west and the oncoming darkness~

Blessed are you, Loving and encircling God,
You are with us in every circumstance.
When the way forward is not clear -
Your word is a lamp to our feet.
The word that brings life,
The word that speaks hope,
The word that opens up Your story
that we all may find our place in it.

God, You surround all with Your love
All who feel betrayed,
All who have been deserted,
All who are broken or broken-hearted,
All who can no longer trust others,
All who feel unable to trust in you.
Blessed are You, our very present help in our troubles.
Blessed be God for ever.

~Facing the North where the light disappears~

Blessed are You, O God
The darkness is no darkness with You.
Bless, O God, all entering a time when light seems absent,
Those whose lives are diminished by power being stripped from them.
Bless those who are belittled by oppression, restricted by injustice,
or whose voices have been silenced.
Lord of life and light,
even in the midst of despair, Your hope is present.
Blessed are you, Lord our God,
Giver of life and light eternal

~Bowling down and touching the earth~

Blessed are You, Lord our God, creator of all things.
Help us to tread lightly wherever our journeys may take us.
Help us not to trespass, or to put our foot in it.
Help us to be courageous and step boldly when we are invited.
For those places where peace, love and justice are made real we give you thanks.
For this place of prayer in the heart of Auchterarder, we give You thanks.
For the community of Hot Chocolate, where boundaries are pushed and journeys are
shared, we give You thanks.
For the creativity of all empowered and celebrated in Livingstone, we give You thanks.
Blessed are you, Lord our God,
For in Christ You came down that we might arise with You.
Blessed are You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

~Raising your arms and eyes upwards~

Blessed are You, eternal God.
We lift up our hearts to You,
God above us, but not beyond us.
In the chances and changes of life,
You abide with us in love and light.

Lord, You never leave or forsake us,
Raise our sights and renew our vision
Let Your gift of eternal life give meaning to our days;
For it is in You we shall find lasting peace and hope.

Give us courage to take on new challenges, to overcome difficulties,
and rise above all that would bring us down.
Blessed be God, giver of life eternal.
Blessed be God for ever.

~Placing your hand over your heart~

Blessed are You, God of love,
You are in each and every one of us.

We thank You for stories shared,
For dreams dreamed and for seeds planted.
For unformed thoughts and unanswered questions,
for insight and inspiration, comfort and challenge.
For all that has touched us or imprinted on us this day,
We thank You.

Keep us open to that which we cannot know now,
But which will come in time,
Like the flowers waiting to bloom when spring arrives.
Help us to live the questions
And to know the gift of an answer when it comes.
Blessed are You Holy Trinity, Three in One,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.
AMEN

