

# An outdoor service of worship for autumn

## Guidance notes

At time of writing, government guidance is clear that outdoor activities are safer than indoor ones. This provides us with an opportunity to worship God in any outdoor spaces that we have available. Many of the biblical stories and encounters took place outdoors. It is in nature that we get to witness God's eternal power and divine nature (Romans 1:20).

Helpful principles for taking church outdoors are available here: [churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/outdoor-worship](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/outdoor-worship)

Do adapt the suggestions here for your context or for individuals to use in an outdoor space that is safe and available to them.

Autumn is often a time when we bring the outside into church buildings. My childhood memories of Harvest services in rural Northern Ireland are of the smell of fruit and flowers as you entered the sanctuary and of the rustle of the barley stalks attached to the end of our pew. It was a delightful multisensory experience. This autumn, we take church outdoors instead.

This suggested Open Air Service is planned so that it can be used in any outdoor space, whether in the grounds of the church building if you have such a space available, or in a nearby green space, following the guidelines for that area. The guidance provided here is for those leading the gathering.

You can gather in a recommended group size of no more than 30 people (at the time of writing).

Prior to the gathering, send out information to help participants prepare for the forecast weather. Waterproofs, warm layers and sturdy shoes are recommended. Please encourage people to bring a flask of coffee, hot chocolate or tea and their own cups, since sharing or providing drinks is not possible for infection control reasons. They may also like to bring a picnic blanket or something to sit on.

Agree on a regathering sound before you begin. You might want to use a musical instrument, such as a bell or a chime (but not a wind instrument), to bring everyone back together at the end of the short wandering activities.

You could also set this activity up as a pilgrimage in the grounds of your church, if you have them. You could adapt the words into stations, using weatherproof displays, for individuals to engage with throughout the week, with appropriate hand sanitising facilities set up at points of contact in your grounds, such as gates.

Do adapt the language and activities to be inclusive of the requirements of your group. For example, where we have written 'walk', you might wish to say 'journey' if that is more appropriate, etc.

## Introduction to the Open Air Service

Welcome those gathered to your autumn Open Air Service.

Explain that the Open Air Service is inspired by the Christian Aid Autumn Appeal.

This year, the Autumn Appeal focuses on Nicaragua. Perhaps just imagining Nicaragua, in Central America, will help us feel warmer.

We'll come to that story a bit later in our gathering, when we have our hot drinks together.

How do we know it is autumn?

Weather patterns are often a key sign in how we define the changing seasons and of how we know that we are now in autumn.

Take a short walk in silence, on your own or in the group you are with. As you walk, reflect on these questions: How do you know it is autumn? What signs tell you that autumn has arrived?

Gather back here in five minutes.

Allow people time to reflect on this as they walk and perhaps answer this quietly in the pair or small group they walk with, to prevent any concerns about coronavirus being spread by raised voices.

### Reading

Have someone prepared to read Psalm 19:1-6. This will be best from a mobile device rather than paper, since it will be less vulnerable to the breeze.

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
And the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
And night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.

Can you imagine where the Psalmist might have been looking to have written this Psalm? Perhaps he had been gazing at the night sky from a cave, revelling in the awe and wonder at the movement of the clouds, or being amazed by the changes in the position of the sun in the sky through the year.

Take a moment to look up at the clouds, the sky and sun (if you can see them), and listen to this reading being said again.

Have the reader read the passage again slowly.

What is this voice that goes out through all the earth saying? What are these words that go to the end of the world?

Take a moment in silence to listen.

The seasons themselves give reason to pause and praise God the Creator.

### Prayer

Take a moment in silent prayer. Give God thanks for autumn and whatever you most enjoy about this season.

Psalm 150:6 says: 'Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!'

Think about everything that is breathing nearby. Trees, greenery, birds, insects or animals.

How might we join in the praise of God when we can't sing or don't have our musical instruments to hand?

We are grateful for every breath that we have.

Conscious that this year the coronavirus pandemic has reminded us of how every breath is vulnerable.

Respirators became the high demand object to help those seriously ill with the virus, breathe.

We were made aware of the poignant final words of George Floyd: 'I can't breathe'. Powerful and heartbreaking words exposing systemic and endemic racism.

Our breath connects us with every living thing and to everyone alive and who has lived

We all breathe the same air.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

Let's pause to breathe in prayer our praise and petition to God.

Invite participants to stand more than two metres away from each other and to take a breath in and out through their nose. They may find it helpful to close their eyes as they stand rooted to the spot.

Saying the words slowly, guide the group through this prayer:

Breathing in fresh air  
Breathing out frustration  
Breathing in God's love  
Breathing out fear  
Breathing in the joy of Christ  
Breathing out stress and strain  
Breathing in the power of the Spirit.  
Breath of God in us  
Renewing and restoring us  
Transforming and empowering us  
To be the people of God  
In this time, for Your world.  
Amen.

### Hot drinks and stories

If possible, move to a spot where everyone can sit together in a socially distant way – perhaps on logs or rocks, or picnic blankets they have brought along. Or remain standing if that isn't possible.

Invite everyone to pour their hot beverage. Before they take a sip, ask them to watch the steam from the cup. The warm air from the hot drink quickly cools and condenses in the cool air.

So often it's the change in the air temperature that tells us when autumn has arrived.

Ask for a show of hands – who has coffee?

If you have coffee, sniff before you sip it.

Allow its aroma to transport you to the warmer climate of Nicaragua. And the world of Angela, a coffee farmer.

The coffee harvests of Nicaragua are being badly affected by climate change. Farmers like Angela are finding their harvests are failing due to irregular rainfall patterns and prolonged drought.

She has watched her coffee crop fail, her livelihood devastated, because of a changing climate.

Many of us have known just such a sense of crisis this year, when the job we depended on or the activities we thrived on were pulled out from under our feet. The sense of insecurity for many of our communities here has been devastating, and perhaps still is for some of us here.

Angela and her community has faced that experience because of climate change.

When we look up at the sun, moon or stars, that's the same sun that Angela feels warming her face. She gazes at the same moon and stars. She breathes the same air as we do.

Now, who has hot chocolate? (You might have brought tea. Please enjoy your tea! But today we're choosing to focus on hot chocolate for our Nicaragua story.)

Smell the hot chocolate before you take a sip. Allow it to fill you with the joy of cocoa.

Angela's community have been supported by Christian Aid's partner Soppexcca to grow cocoa instead of coffee. And cocoa is used for making chocolate! It's a source of joy for many of us. And a source of joy for Angela's community too, since cocoa is much less vulnerable to the changing climate in Nicaragua and is a more reliable crop.

Just as we reached out to help our community and our neighbours during coronavirus, we have also reached out to help our extended global community and our global neighbours through our support of Christian Aid.

Take time to enjoy your hot drink. As you warm your hands around your cup, reflect on the hands that have reached out to help each other across the world this year. Give thanks to God for the goodness of humanity working to bring heaven to earth.

## Closing prayer

Let us say quietly together the words Jesus taught us as our closing prayer, the words that are known and said around the world.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever.  
Amen.

## Fellowship

Spend time together in fellowship over hot drinks and consider what acts of kindness you might do as a church community this autumn, for your local community and to fundraise for your global neighbours in Nicaragua. Visit Brew and Bake for ideas: [caid.org.uk/brewandbake](https://caid.org.uk/brewandbake)

## Additional information

If you decide this outdoor service is not suitable for your community, Christian Aid is also providing an online service on 6 September on Facebook.

More information about the Autumn Appeal can be found here: [caid.org.uk/neighbours](https://caid.org.uk/neighbours)

Worship resources, including a prayer sheet, can be found here: [caid.org.uk/autumnresources](https://caid.org.uk/autumnresources)

Watch the film *The church forests of Ethiopia* for inspiration and to reflect on how your church stewards and conserves creation:

<https://vimeo.com/390833915>

Read *Song of the prophets: A global theology of climate change* – Christian Aid's report updated in 2020. [caid.org.uk/songoftheprophets](https://caid.org.uk/songoftheprophets)

Receive monthly emails with points for prayer and information about new worship and theology resources. Sign up here:

[caid.org.uk/worshipsignup](https://caid.org.uk/worshipsignup)

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