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15 Bible-based service outlines for those who plan or lead all-age worship, including:
- Remembrance Sunday
- Christmas Day
- Mothering Sunday
- Good Friday
- Easter Sunday
- Pentecost
- Father’s Day
- Harvest
- And many more
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Scripture Union is an international Christian charity working with churches in more than 130 countries, providing resources to bring the good news about Jesus to children, young people and families and encourage them to develop spiritually through the Bible and prayer.
Welcome! to the first volume of the All-Age Service Annual – Scripture Union’s brand new resource for those who plan and lead all-age services.

In this practical and sturdy volume you’ll find 15 creative service outlines to take the stress out of your all-age worship planning. The services cover all the major Christian festivals as well as other occasions that you’ll want to mark together as a church family. Every service is Bible-based and requires that a portion of both the Old and New Testament be read to your all-age congregation. Here at Scripture Union we reject any idea that substance must be sacrificed in order to make worship appealing to all ages!

If your children’s and young people’s groups use resources from Scripture Union’s Light range, look out for the ‘Light Link’ paragraph in each service outline – this tells you how you might establish a link between the theme of the service and the themes current in the Light syllabus.

We recognise, of course, that on those other Sundays in the month when all ages don’t stay together for the whole of the service, they nevertheless are together either at the beginning or the end of the service. To help resource these times we’re providing All-Age Service Starters. These can be downloaded free of charge to users of the All-Age Service Annual, from our website at www.scriptureunion.org.uk/light. Also there you’ll also find an all-age service for Bible Sunday that invites your congregation to get involved in Scripture Union’s Into the Bible project – a major new initiative to resource and support the teaching of the Bible in schools.

The All-Age Service Annual has been developed in direct response to research carried out by Scripture Union into the practices and needs of churches with regard to all-age worship. We hope that as you read and then use these outlines with your congregation you will feel that they meet your needs and enable your church family to encounter the living God in your worship together.

Do let us know what you think!

Nigel Hopper (Editor)

The All-Age Service Annual team would like to express our thanks to those who devised and wrote the service outlines in this volume: Alex Taylor, Tricia Williams, Jacqueline Bull, Helen Gale, Ro Willoughby, Ruth Wills, Piers Lane, Rachel Taylor, Robert Willoughby, Alan Charter, John Marshall, John Grayston and Darren Hill.
How to get the most from the *All-Age Service Annual*

First, even though it should go without saying, do allow sufficient time to prepare for your service. Leading worship is both a great privilege and a great responsibility. It therefore deserves rather more in the way of preparation than a couple of hours hastily snatched the night before the service. We have produced the *All-Age Service Annual* to assist you in attending to your responsibilities with regard to all-age worship, not to relieve you of those responsibilities.

Do set aside time to pray about your service before diving into the practicalities of planning. As you start to plan, make a point of first reading the ‘Background’ and, if relevant in your case, ‘Light Link’ components. These will help you set your service in context. Then read through the entire outline to get an overview of the service and a feel for how its components relate to each other.

Every service outline in the *All-Age Service Annual* is made up of the following components:

- **Background**
  - Light Link
  - Introduction
  - Confession to God
- **Praise of God**
  - Prayer to God
  - Receiving God’s blessing
  - Responding to God
- **Listening to God – the reading of the Bible**
  - Thanksgiving to God
- **Listening to God – the teaching of the Bible**

With the exception of the first three, these components will be arranged in a different order for different services (though note that ‘Receiving God’s blessing’ will normally appear as the last item). You, however, should feel free to rearrange the order of the components according to your knowledge of what will work best with your congregation. Similarly, you are free to amend or leave out altogether any components that you think will hinder rather than help your congregation in their all-age worship. We would strongly recommend, however, that you always include the public reading of the Bible in your all-age services.

Make sure you adapt the language in the *All-Age Service Annual* to suit the needs of your particular congregation. You know your congregation better than we do, so it is up to you to make the ideas contained here work for them. This is another reason for allowing sufficient time to plan and prepare your all-age service. Consider any safety issues, particularly where very young children are concerned. Make a special note of any components that require advance preparation. This will save you the stress of suddenly discovering that crucial preparation has been overlooked.

In some cases, we have provided items on the *All-Age Service Annual* webpages (to be found at www.scriptureunion.org.uk/light) to help you – either to be used as they are or to give an example to be copied or adapted to taste. These items are indicated in the text as they are mentioned and, if used, will need to be identified and downloaded in advance of your service.

If you are going to follow a recommendation to use a DVD clip, you will need to check its certification and obtain permission from the parents of young children for them to see the clip, if necessary. You should also ensure that your church holds the relevant license to show film clips; details of the Church Video Licence are available at www.ccli.co.uk.

You may find some of these services contain suggestions on obtaining images via the Internet for use in PowerPoint presentations or for other purposes. In almost all cases, images should be used for non-commercial purposes only. You have a responsibility to check for yourself the conditions involved, and the copyright status and owner of any image you should find.

Finally, do remember to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit even as your service is in progress. Don’t let these outlines and your planning around them prevent you from saying, doing or including something that you genuinely believe is from God. After all, it is he who is the focus of our all-age worship.
REMEmBRANCE SUNDaY
(November) (MICaH 4:1–5, MATTHew 5:3–10, REVELATION 21:1–4)

BackgROund

Many Christians struggle with the idea of Remembrance Sunday. ‘Why,’ many ask, ‘should we celebrate a day that glorifies such a destructive force as war?’ It is, however, very difficult to categorise wars, saying this one is just and that one is not. Often we just don’t know all the details, background and circumstances. However, looking beyond the reasons for war and the political arguments out of which wars may arise, we need to recognise the ordinary people who fight, are wounded and die in war. These people give their lives for their countries, often in the hope that by doing so they will preserve their own way of life. From the battles of the Israelites as they sought to secure the land God had promised them to the most recent conflicts around the world, soldiers have shown bravery, grace and compassion in the midst of some of the most horrific events anyone could ever witness. It is these people who are remembered on Remembrance Sunday. The bravery and sacrifice of these people is what we give thanks to God for.

Examining God’s Word in the Bible, we see that it is because we live in a fallen world that wars and conflicts occur, blighting God’s creation. The prophecy of Micah looks forward to a time when all fighting will cease, because God will live with his people. There will be no need for weapons! Jesus’ words in Matthew 5 give hope and reassurance to those who are suffering now; God will reward those in heaven. And Revelation 21:1–4 reminds us that when God establishes his kingdom for eternity, there will be no fighting or war: ‘He will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there will be no more death, suffering, crying or pain. These things of the past are gone for ever.’

People of all ages will be familiar with stories of war – through school, television and the Internet – we are all bombarded with images, sounds and stories of war. Many in the congregation, especially older members, will have friends and relatives who have died in conflicts. Often this day brings back painful memories, of loved ones killed in terrible circumstances. Be sensitive to those people and make sure you have a ministry team available for prayer.

Link

Users of Scripture Union’s Light resources have recently been exploring the theme of God’s love for his people and his desire to rescue them in Luke 14 and 15, and are about to encounter God’s lordship and foreknowledge in the book of Jeremiah. Both of these themes are picked up in this service. The prophecy of Micah, like parts of Jeremiah, promises deliverance and peace for God’s people (after judgement) and Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount are indicative of his lordship and foreknowledge. The verses from Revelation 21 give a glimpse of the future to which both the words of Micah and the words of Jesus were, ultimately, pointing.
INTRODUCTION

Before the service, make poppies by cutting out circles of red paper to make petals and push two onto the end of a chenille wire (also known as pipe-cleaners). Make enough for each member of the congregation to have one (do not give these to young children). Show one of the poppies you have prepared and ask the congregation what the flower represents and why we use it to remember wars. Explain that poppies grow naturally wherever soil has been disturbed. The battles fought in Belgium and France during the First World War were so fierce that the soil was churned up and the poppies bloomed as they had never done before. When the fighting stopped, it wasn’t long before the battlefields were covered with poppies. Since the 1920s, people have used the poppy as a symbol to remember those who were killed in the First World War, then the Second World War and then in any war. Give out your poppies and ask the congregation to keep hold of them.

Show a clip from the film *Oh! What a Lovely War* (Paramount Pictures 1969, certificate PG), where the German and English troops meet at Christmas time in ‘no-man’s-land’. As the congregation watches this clip, ask them to remove the paper petals from the stalk of their poppies and to then shape the stalk into something they have seen from the film. Clip

Explain how the event you’ve been watching happened in 1914 and went on for some weeks. It was only when the German troops were relieved by other platoons that the fighting started again. The authorities were incensed that soldiers had been fraternising with the enemy and were disgusted by this ‘outbreak’ of peace! Talk briefly about how this was a unique event in the war, and that it turned the whole idea of war on its head.

Alternatively, put together a PowerPoint presentation using pictures of the First World War (eg poppies, barbed wire and battlefields). You’ll find some photos you can use on the All-Age Service Annual website (www.scriptureunion.org.uk/light – www.freepost.com is another good source of photos that can be used for non-commercial purposes). Show your PowerPoint presentation and tell the story of the Christmas 1914 unofficial ceasefire. Ask the congregation to turn their chenille wire stalks (removing the paper petals first) into something they have seen on the presentation. Talk briefly about how this was a unique event in the war, and that it turned the whole idea of war on its head.

Sing together some, or all of these hymns:

‘Abide with me’;
‘Lord, for the years’;
‘O God, our help in ages past’

These have special relevance to Remembrance Sunday, and are also likely to be well known enough that any non-churched people who have come especially for this service will know them.
THANKSGIVING TO GOD

Before the service, prepare either a large poppy flower from red paper, or have a free-standing cross ready for use in this part of the service. Place the poppy flower or cross at the front of the room.

Invite the congregation to hold in their hand one of the paper poppy petals that they removed from the chenille wire stalk earlier. Ask them to think of someone in their family or from amongst their friends whom they have lost in a war or conflict. Give everyone a pen or a pencil and ask them to write that person’s name on the petal, thanking God for that person’s life and the sacrifice they made, so that others might have a better life. Alternatively, they could write down the name of a place where God has brought about peace when there was war. Often these places have a very tense peace so, as people write, they could thank God and pray for the peace to hold and for people to befriend each other again. (Adults may need to help children pray and talk through these issues to help them understand).

Then play some quiet music and invite everyone to come to the front and stick their paper poppy petal to the large poppy flower or cross. When your poppy or cross is covered with small poppy petals and everyone has sat down, say a prayer thanking God for the lives of the people named, for the sacrifice represented here and for those places where a recent peace needs strengthening.

Leave the poppy or cross at the front of church as a clear visual reminder of the meaning of Remembrance Sunday.

LISTENING TO GOD

The reading of the Bible

Micah 4:1–5
Matthew 5:3–10

Read these two passages out yourself, or ask two members of the congregation to prepare in advance to read. During the Matthew reading, you could illustrate each verse with an appropriate illustration or photograph, to help the congregation to engage in a new way with the passage.

LISTENING TO GOD

The teaching of the Bible

Read out the following account of Harry Patch, one of only four surviving British veterans of World War One. You could ask an older member of the congregation to read it out for you. Try to get hold of a picture of Harry Patch, so that you can show it while his story is being read.

Harry Patch's story

Harry Patch was born in 1898 and is one of the few remaining survivors of the First World War. He is the last surviving British soldier to serve in Belgium or France (in the line of trenches known as the Western Front). He was a private in the Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry and fought at the Third Battle of Ypres. After the war, he became a plumber and, during World War Two, a fireman. Throughout all this time, Harry did not speak about his experiences in the trenches during the First World War, and it was only when he reached 100 years old that he started to tell his story. Like so many others
who took part, the war was a distant, but horrific memory and was too painful to relive — an old song of the time goes, ‘And when they ask us how dangerous it was, we'll never tell them, no, we'll never tell them.’

In November 2004, at the age of 106, Harry went back to the battlefields in Belgium and was introduced to the 108-year-old German Charles Kuentz, who had fought for the German army at the Battle of Passchendaele. Their meeting was warm and they exchanged gifts. Patch said, ‘I was a bit doubtful before meeting a German soldier. Herr Kuentz is a very nice gentleman however. He is all for a united Europe and peace — and so am I.’

Talk about how war is a time of great crisis and brings instability, sadness and grief to the countries involved. The soldiers who fight are sometimes unsure of the real reasons for the war, not fully comprehending why they have to fight and kill soldiers from another army. War is nearly always declared by governments in the case of international conflicts, or by powerful factions in the case of civil wars. Ordinary people, like Harry Patch, like the thousands of people living in refugee camps in Darfur and Chad (thanks to the conflict in Sudan), are caught ‘in the middle’:

‘Why should the British government call me up and take me out to a battlefield to shoot a man I never knew, whose language I couldn't speak? All those lives lost for a war finished over a table. Now what is the sense in that? It’s just an argument between two governments …

I don’t think it is possible to truly explain the bond that is forged between a soldier in the trenches and his fellow soldiers. There you all are, no matter what your life in civvy street, covered in lice, desperately hungry, eking out the small treats — the ounce of tobacco, the biscuit. You relied on him and he on you, never really thinking that it was just the same for the enemy. But it was. It was every bit as bad.’

(Word of Harry Patch, taken from Last Post by Max Arthur — used by kind permission of the author)

Say how this was true of Israel and Judah, the cities to which Micah was prophesying. Explain how the leaders of the two countries had disobeyed God and led their nations away from him. War would be forced on these countries because of the actions of their leaders. Point out the strange mixture of doom and hope in Micah’s prophecy. Both death and destruction and hope for restoration are promised.

Read the passage again. Talk about how when God is finally worshipped for who he is and people obey him, wars will end and there will be no need for weapons. Show the words of Micah 4:3 to the congregation (use PowerPoint or OHT, prepared before the service).

Ask everyone to take up the shape they made with their chenille wire poppy stalk — something that represents the experience of those involved in war. Everybody should now reshaped their wire into something that can be used in farming — a spade, a fork, a plough. Say that Micah says God will sort out fighting and disagreement and the instruments of war will be will instead be used to provide for people. Fear; confusion and killing will all cease. If you are able to get hold of some, show pictures of artwork made by artists who turn weapons into pieces of art.

Go on to say that Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:3–10 mean that this time has not yet come. Not everyone obeys God’s laws and worships him at the moment. People still grieve, are treated badly for doing right, need to be merciful and need to make peace. Throughout his ministry Jesus said and did many things that challenged the accepted ways of doing things. He placed a great emphasis on serving rather than being served and he reached out to the outcasts of society, valuing those who were deemed worthless. These verses are the essence of Jesus — being merciful, obeying God, being humble, pure and making peace. If we were all like Jesus, then war and fighting would fade away.

But we’re not. We live in a world still full of sin, and so conflict continues.
CONFESSION TO GOD

Before the service print out each verse from Matthew 5:3–10 on a separate sheet of paper and stick them up around the room (if you have a large congregation, have more than one copy of each verse). Give everyone a pen or a pencil and explain that you’d like them to move around the various sheets of paper and think of a time when they have not been or done whatever Jesus is asking them to be and do (made peace, been merciful, been humble) or when they have not comforted those who grieve, or stood up for those who are being mistreated. They should say a prayer next to each sheet of paper and then tick it as a sign that you have said sorry. Parents or significant adults should assist children with this activity, helping them think about each of these things, and what they need to say sorry for. While you are doing this activity, play some background music so that people are less distracted by what others are doing. When everyone has finished, invite them to return to their seats and pick up their chenille wire once more. Pray a prayer of forgiveness as people hold their chenille wires, thanking God for his forgiveness and asking him for help in being more merciful, humble or comforting in future.

PRAYER TO GOD

Lay a large world map on the floor at the front of the room, next to your large poppy flower or cross, which you used in the ‘Thanksgiving to God’ section of the service. Ask the congregation to find the second poppy petal which they removed from the stalk at the beginning of the service (they have already used the other one). Make sure everyone still has a pen or pencil and ask them to think of somewhere they would like to pray for, where war continues to cause death, grief and suffering and where peacemakers are needed. They should then write this on their paper poppy petal.

Play some background music and invite the congregation to come up once more and place their poppy petals on the map, where the country that they have written down is. Don’t worry if everyone has written the same place (this may be quite likely if a certain war has been featured heavily on the news) and be ready to help people who don’t know where a country is do locate it. Instead of sitting down again, invite everyone to stand round the map and pray the words of the responsive prayer below together (consider whether you will project or print out the words). Do this even if you have a large congregation as the experience of all standing together to pray is a powerful one.

We pray for these parts of the world highlighted on this map.
We will remember them as we pray.
Lord, where neighbour is set against neighbour, please bring peace.
We will remember them as we pray.
Where the weak and helpless are beaten by the mighty, please bring justice.
We will remember them as we pray.
Where children are forced to fight, please bring them freedom.
We will remember them as we pray.
Where hatred means that war and revenge continues, please bring forgiveness.
We will remember them as we pray.
Where people depend on their own strength and beliefs rather than depending on you, please bring humility.

We remember these countries, these people, these places as we pray to you, Jesus, Prince of Peace, for peace throughout the world. Amen.
RESPONDING TO GOD

Read aloud Revelation 21:1—4. Then sing some songs that tell of the time to come when all fighting and war will cease, when we will all live with God and God with us. Let this be a time of joyous celebration for the time to come, but don’t forget the sombre nature of the start of the service. People suffered in the past and are still now suffering because of war and conflict. So be sensitive if there are any in your congregation who have families or friends caught up in current or recent conflicts.

Suitable songs include:
‘There’s a sound of the wind’;
‘There’s a place where the streets shine’

RECEIVING GOD’S BLESSING

Read out this poem of Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

You could then sing as a prayer the song ‘Make me a channel of your peace’ which contains part of this poem.
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