

A HARVEST FESTIVAL

Introduction

This service recalls the ancient harvest offering of the people of Israel as they were asked to take the first of all their harvest to God in thanks for the gift of the promised Land. The festival has deep foundations and is as old as the worship of God; yet in this festival, we become aware of the way humanity has misused creation itself.

OUTLINE ORDER OF SERVICE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Hymn Come ye thankful people come (40)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Reading: from Deuteronomy 26

Gathering the Harvest

Celebration Song and Dance

Luke 12.16-21 (read by narrator and harvester)

Conversations about our harvest

Hymn Praise and Thanksgiving (48)

The second Gathering of Harvest

Hymn or music

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession
gathered from the congregation

Hymn You shall go out with joy (415)

Benediction

PREPARATION

Many congregations decorate their church building the day before Harvest service. For this service, the same is suggested with the display very vibrant in colour and effect. Traditional harvest coloured fabric (orange, red, rust, gold, olive, etc), draped over tables or steps could be mixed with more modern equivalents of newspaper, foil, or cardboard. Tinned and packaged produce should be displayed alongside fresh; products of

congregational crafts or skills (needlework, carving, electrical goods, paintings..) should be added to widen the idea of Harvest. Some groups of people could prepare models or images of modern harvesting equipment such as machinery for harvesting oil or coal. Space needs to be left for more items to be placed during the service the next day.

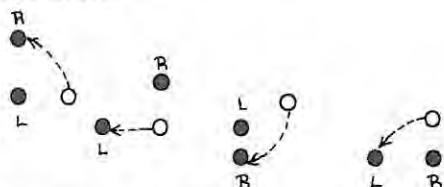
If the church has chairs, the chairs should be set out in two semi circles facing each other with the main harvest display having a central focus:

If there are pews, the display needs to be high enough to be seen from all the positions of the worship space.

For the **Gathering of the Harvest**, some baskets of apples and coal should be placed at the entrance to the church, for people who may not bring something to the service itself.

For the **Celebration Hymn and Dance**, a small group needs to learn the "Grapevine step", as detailed so it may be danced to the song, "In the presence of your people". (MISSION PRAISE 108)

- 1 Stand in a line or circle with equal weight on both feet.
 - 2 Step right foot across to front of left
 - 3 Step L foot to left
 - 4 Step R foot behind L foot
 - 5 Step L foot to left
- Repeat as long as desired, then reverse



For the Second Harvest, coloured card needs cut into fruit or vegetable shapes and pit head winding gear shapes no larger than the display produce. There should be at least one card-shape for each member of the congregation.

THE SERVICE

Call to Worship: This may be any reading which calls Harvest to mind. An alternative is the opening sentence in Rejoice and Sing 1A.

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

These should be of a harvest theme with particular reference in the prayers of confession to the misuse of the world's resources, and the unequal distribution of the world's harvest.

READING FROM DEUTERONOMY 26 is antiphonal; one side of the congregation reading the bold case, the opposite side the following line:

My ancestor was a wandering aramean

a homeless refugee who took his family to Egypt to live.

They were few in number when they went,

but they became a large and powerful nation.

The egyptians treated us harshly and forced us to work as slaves.

Then we cried out for help to the Lord, the God of our ancestors.

He heard us and saw our suffering, hardship, and misery.

By his great power and strength he rescued us from Egypt.

He worked miracles and wonders,

and caused terrifying things to happen.

He brought us here and gave us this rich and fertile land;

so now I bring to the Lord the first part of the harvest

of the harvest

he has given me.

GATHERING OF THE HARVEST

As a re-enactment of the Harvest described in the reading, the congregation is invited to bring forward: the harvest gifts they might have brought to the service or an apple or a piece of coal taken from the baskets at the entrance to the church; they place these anywhere on the prepared harvest display. They also take their money offering and give this to stewards who will be standing near the Harvest display. At least one steward needs to collect offering and harvest from members who could not walk to the front.

CELEBRATION SONG AND DANCE

The congregation is invited to continue worship in the way the ancient people of Israel would have worshipped: with a "dance before the Lord". The song, "In the presence of your people" is sung by the whole congregation once, with those who learned the dance making their way to the edges of the congregation, around the outside of the circle of chairs or the outside aisles of the pews. All who want to dance with them are invited to join the group. It is a simple dance to learn and can be picked up quite easily. It is good if the group is large enough to join hands around the outside edge of the congregational seating area. If not, the group of dancers joins hands where they meet, and then dance around the edges of the seating. The song is sung through at least three times while the dance is happening; more if it feels right, and faster as it goes along.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HARVEST

The congregation is invited to think quietly about the Bible passage and think what might be 'stored up' in their own barns and in the 'warehouses' of the world (butter, grain mountains, wine lakes...). Then the congregation is asked to form into twos to: (a) discuss the Bible passage (b) discuss world harvest and personal harvest of time, talent, or wealth; they are asked to consider how they might answer if they were "hoarder" of the reading. They are encouraged to think of how harvests might be shared.

At this time, the card shapes are distributed to each person. On one side of the card people write a thought about the world harvest, on the other, a thought about personal harvest. In the pair, the first listener writes the first speaker's words and then the process is reversed. Each writes the thoughts of the other. The cards are put aside for the moment.

SECOND GATHERING

After the hymn, the congregation is asked, in the same manner of the first harvest offering, to bring their cards to the harvest display (help given in case of disability).

Discussion, either led by the worship leader asking questions or by the congregational discussion as before. Discussion points are: harvest is not just the traditional view, the OT leaves some harvest for gleaners, in the example of God who died in humanity in Jesus, we see the example of sacrifice for humanity which the modern harvest calls us to remember.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

The Prayer leader asks the congregation to speak of what they would pray, both in thanks and in hope for the world. Either the leader writes prayer subjects down and prays from the list, or a scribe could write the ideas into categories for the prayer leader to use during the corporate prayers.

HYMN

"You shall go out with joy" may be danced and the congregation led out..