**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

**Before using this service outline,
read the notes on** [**how to use the sessions**](https://www.methodist.org.uk/mwoloutlines)**.**

**Service**

The Methodist calling to ‘Service’ contains three practices: challenging injustice, serving others, and seeking the flourishing of all creation. These practices relate to how we commit to serve people and the world around us, both near and far.

**Serve**

**“We will help people in our communities and beyond”**

**Key themes**

* From the very beginning, God created us to need each other.
* When we help someone, or receive help from someone, God invites us to see God in one another (Matthew 25:40).
* All people can give and receive. And just because someone has a need, it doesn’t make them powerless to also serve and give kindness to themselves or others.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 10:27; James 2:14-17

**Background reflection**

A commitment to serving or helping people in our local communities and beyond has always been an essential trait of Methodism. Examples range from Methodism’s involvement in the abolition of slavery through to hundreds of foodbanks, night shelters and community centres run by Methodist people and/or located in Methodist buildings around the country.

*This would be a good time to ask a discussion question about serving our neighbours.*

A Methodist Way of Life has a natural rhythm, which has been compared to breathing: we breathe in the love of God and breathe out love of God and others. We read this in Luke 10:27 – love God and out of that, love your neighbour. As Ephesians 2:10 puts it: “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

Who is our ‘neighbour’? By this, we mean more than the person who lives next door, or even the people in your local village, town or city. There is something both local and global in the biblical use of neighbour, which is captured in MWOL when we say we wish to help our communities and beyond. This might include the work of the Global Relations team in supporting Partner Churches across the world, Methodist-birthed international development charity All We Can, and partner organisation Action for Children (also founded by a Methodist minister), as well as a local foodbank or social enterprise.

It is important that we recognise the ‘we’ in this commitment. Individually we may feel powerless to change things, but between us, together, we can make a difference in our world. We can all play our parts in helping others, led by their needs rather than our

assumptions on what ‘help’ looks like. The invitation is to listen and learn the needs of our communities and our whole world, and then to put that learning to good use.

A story (*you may wish to replace it with your own*): The Sant’Egidio Community in Barcelona was established after a visit to Rome by its founders, during which they met the Sant’Egidio Community there and were struck by the simplicity of their commitment to prayer, the poor and peace. Upon deciding to set up their own community, they had a clear idea how prayer might function as a core practice in their community and had some views about how to strive for and practice peace. They soon realised, however, that they didn’t really know anyone who was poor. As a result, they went out of their way to meet, sit with and listen to some of the poorest people living in and around the city. Rather than plan ‘a project for the poor’, they sought to listen first; to get alongside and act out of a spirit of partnership and relationship.

*Ask a discussion question on learning about others.*

Like all the practices of MWOL, service can be a ‘thin place’ or ‘means of grace’. In the act of helping those in our local community and beyond, we meet God in other people and learn more about the divine. The kind of acts of hospitality described in Isaiah 58 are challenging to our very way of life. How do we invite the homeless poor into our homes? It runs counter to the message that much of Western civilisation has indoctrinated us into – a preservation of ourselves and our small family unit. Yet the promise of Isaiah 58 is incredible. For although the challenges of the first few verses in the reading are difficult, the promise God makes through the prophet is that all that has been lost and broken will be restored. We are invited to see the reward that comes with putting justice first, with seeking to be a people who put justice at the heart of all we do.

**Further notes**

* This commitment is wrapped up with another: “We will challenge injustice”. Helping people involves serving their immediate needs, but there is also a need to deal with issues that cause deprivation. Working for social justice is therefore a big part of helping people. A common metaphor is that of someone who has fallen in a river. Do you wade in to get them out, or do you travel upstream to change the circumstances that led to the fall, ensuring no one else falls in again? Of course, we need both.
* Isaiah 58:6-7 says: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice… Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house.” This continues a theme first encountered in Isaiah 1:13: “bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me”. Unlike the gods of ancient myths (like the Babylonians, Egyptians, or Greeks), our God is not a vain one sustained by our worship. Our God is one who sees worship in how we love and serve others.
* What rituals are taking up our time and resources today? Perhaps the most obvious ‘regular ritual’ for many Christian communities is coming to church on a Sunday (this may be a different time or activity for pioneer communities and others).
* ‘Servant leadership’ is a popular phrase within Christian circles. However, it is often misapplied to suggest that Christians should only serve, not lead. In Jesus, we see that servanthood is a posture of leadership, not the abdication of leadership. It is a leadership that exists to serve others, and to support the leadership of others, but which also takes action when needed.
* Helping others can involve self-sacrifice; this is something we should both embrace and be cautious about. There is a common thread in the gospel stories that Jesus was often asked to help people when he was in a rest period. We must prepare to be interrupted at inconvenient times. But while sacrificing for others can be a beautiful thing, we must also care for ourselves, and be wary of overcommitting ourselves (see the Care commitment of MWOL).

**Song and hymn suggestions**

You’ve got a friend in me – Randy Newman

Brother, sister, let me serve you (*StF* 611)

Come, now, you blessèd, eat at my table (*StF* 695)

I will speak out for those who have no voices (*StF* 702)

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love (*StF* 249)

Lord, you have come to the seashore (*StF* 558)

Send me out from here, Lord (*MP* 594)

Sent by the Lord am I (*StF* 239)

We shall make peace (*StF+)*

**Creative activity suggestions**

Before you meet, recruit some volunteers (of all ages) to go ‘above and beyond’ in serving people at your next meeting. They could take people’s coats, open the door every time someone arrives or leaves, or hand deliver drinks to seats. At a good point in the meeting, ask people how it felt to serve, and how it felt to be served.

**Discussion questions**

* How have you served your neighbours recently, as an individual or community?
* Is there a group of people in our local community or the wider world with whom you feel a particular affiliation, or a sense of anger about their plight?
* How is God inviting you to serve your neighbours? What is yours to do?
* What might be the missing piece in your commitment: prayer, peace, or poverty?
* Isaiah 58 talks of rituals of worship for the Hebrews (fasting, offerings and incense) which took the place of seeking justice. What might be your equivalents today?
* How much do you know about the social justice issues you are involved with (eg how much research do you do into the charities you support)? Is there something you could find out more about, in order to try to make a difference?
* Who have you helped recently? Who has helped you recently?
* What choices do you make about making the world a better place?
* If you are serving too much, might God be encouraging you to stop something?

**Prayer Ideas**

* In the [*Daily Cordial* podcast](https://thedailycordial.com/robbell/) (12 May 2016), the American author Rob Bell talks about the simple phrase ‘show me’. Listen to part of the podcast and invite God to ‘show me’ what is mine to do, which people may value my help, and the people who are helping me.
* What is yours to do? Who could you help today? Locally and globally? Allow time for people to reflect on ‘what is theirs to do’ to help others in their community and beyond in a tangible way. Write a commitment on the back of an MWOL postcard or add an alert on your phone. Share this with the person next to you and pray for each other.

*Explore creative ways to pray with all ages, using the Methodist prayer cards, available as*[*a printed pack*](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/EGIPC22/intergenerational-prayer-cards)*for meetings and events,*[*a PowerPoint*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28465/intergenerationalprayercards-smaller.pptx)*for church services and meetings or*[*as a PDF*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28466/digital-prayer-cards-131222.pdf)*for digital use.*

**Ways to respond**

* Explore [methodist.org.uk/Serve](http://methodist.org.uk/serve)
* Show your gratitude to those in the ‘service industry’ such as waiting staff, posties, grocery drivers, and delivery drivers.
* Consider volunteering for church, charity, or a local enterprise (if you’re not already).
* Consider whether God might be encouraging you to step back from any roles, for your own self-care. Could you support others in taking over these roles?
* For more on how we can be ‘with’ people in need, and that Jesus’ ministry was expressed as a kind of ‘with-ness’, see Samuel Wells’ book *The Nazareth Manifesto* (Wiley Blackwell).
* For an example of how living alongside people and learning much more about them before acting is the best, most transformative and most gospel-based way to live out this part of a Methodist Way of Life, see Shane Claiborne’s book *The Irresistible Revolution* (Zondervan) and explore how to nurture a [Church at the Margins](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discover-church-at-the-margins/).

To find out more about partnering with our global neighbours, visit [allwecan.org.uk/partnership](http://allwecan.org.uk/partnership) and the work of the [Global Relations team](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-worldwide/global-relationships/) of the Methodist Church.