

Harvest service plan

About this service plan

- This plan includes a suggested structure, ideas for prayers, a talk, and also hymns and songs you could include in a Harvest service.
- For more ideas and printed resources to use in your Harvest services and celebrations, please see [Harvest Trussell tables](#).
- This plan is based on a non-eucharistic service (Service of the Word) but can be easily adapted to fit a communion service.
- It draws on prayers from the Anglican tradition but can be adapted for any denomination.
- Hymns and songs are suggested at suitable points, but feel free to choose your own. A list of suggested hymns and songs is included towards the end.
- Words in bold are for everyone to say.

Beforehand

- Start advertising your Harvest festival several weeks in advance on your notice sheets, noticeboards, parish magazines and social media. Harvest festivals can be popular community events. Is there an opportunity to work with local schools and/or community groups to promote your service?
- Make it clear in advance whether you will be holding a collection of goods to be donated to a local food bank or a financial collection, so people can come prepared. If you are collecting goods, liaise with a local food bank to see what items are particularly required.
- In preparing for this service, you might want to find out more about Trussell at trussell.org.uk/support-us/churches

Why hold a Harvest service?

Harvest festival may seem like a very ancient tradition, but it was actually a Victorian innovation by the Cornish clergyman, Reverend Robert Hawker (1803-75). Hawker wanted to revive the Lammas-tide tradition of giving thanks for the 'first fruits' of the wheat harvest. Lammas-tide traditionally took place in early August, but Hawker moved his Harvest festival to early October and instead made it a celebration of the 'gathering in' of all the harvest.

A Harvest festival today is an opportunity to give thanks to God for his provision for all our needs, and to take practical action to help people in need. This service focuses on the work of Trussell, a charity who support a network of 1,400 food bank centres all over the UK. They are also working to raise awareness of the reasons people have no option but to turn to a food bank, as well as campaign for a future where everyone has enough to cover life's essentials. As the cost of living continues to soar,

food banks have seen a decrease in donations alongside an increasing need in their communities for support.

This service is an opportunity to raise awareness of the work of Trussell (including your local food bank if you have one) and to invite donations (of goods and money) to support this work.

Service plan

Greeting

Welcome, in the name of Christ.

God's grace, mercy and peace be with you

And also with you.

Opening hymn

We Plough The Fields and Scatter or Come Ye Thankful People Come

Introduction to the service

A very warm welcome to our Harvest festival, when we give thanks to God for all his good gifts, and especially today for the provision of food. But as we celebrate today we're very mindful that although we live in a wealthy country (the fifth richest in the world), around one in seven people are facing hunger – and the inadequacy of social security, particularly in the face of the rising cost of living, is driving more and more people to the doors of food banks.

Today we will be thinking about our call as Christians to be in solidarity with people facing hunger and hardship – and there will be an opportunity to support the work of Trussell. Trussell is a charity that supports 1,400 food bank locations across the UK, many of them run by churches. These food banks provide people in our communities with emergency food parcels, compassion, advice and practical support. They also campaign for change to end the need for food banks in the UK.

Unfortunately, as the level of need has increased, donations have not kept up – and some food banks are struggling to meet this rise. That's why our support is even more vital.

Thank you if you've brought some goods to donate today. There will be an opportunity to bring those up later, and there will also be opportunities to make a financial donation, and to think more deeply about our response to God's call to be compassionate and generous towards people who are struggling.

Introduction to confession

As we begin our service, let's take a few moments to ask God's forgiveness for the injustices we see in our world today.

The confession

God has blessed us,

but still God's children go hungry.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

God has blessed us,

but still the poor cry out for justice.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Absolution

Almighty God,

who forgives all who truly repent,

have mercy upon you,

pardon and deliver you from all your sins,

confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,

God has blessed us,

but still we see inequality and oppression in the earth.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Amen.

and keep you in life eternal;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A special prayer for Harvest

Eternal God, you crown the year with your goodness

and give us the fruits of the earth in their season:

grant that we may use them to your glory,

to benefit everyone we share our community with:

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Hymn or song

e.g. *Give Thanks With A Grateful Heart*, or *In The Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful* (see list at end).

First reading: Psalm 67 (NRSV)

1 May God be gracious to us and bless us	and guide the nations upon earth.
and make his face to shine upon us,	5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;
2 That your way may be known upon earth,	let all the peoples praise you.
your saving power among all nations.	6 The earth has yielded its increase;
3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;	God, our God, has blessed us.
let all the peoples praise you.	7 May God continue to bless us;
4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,	let all the ends of the earth revere him.
for you judge the peoples with equity	

Gospel reading: Luke 12.13-21

This reading could be done in a dramatised version with 3 different readers: one to be the narrator/Jesus, one to be the rich man and one to be the voice of God.

Talk

- This talk is based on the Gospel passage suggested for use in this service, Luke 12.13-21. We have used the NRSV but feel free to use whichever version you prefer:

13 Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' 14 But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' 15 And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' 16 Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" 18 Then he said, "I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" 20 But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is

being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.' (NRSV)

Points for your talk

- This is a parable, a story told by Jesus to illustrate a point.
- It is worth noting the context in which Jesus tells the parable. He has just been asked by someone to intervene in a dispute about a will – two siblings are quarrelling about an inheritance – sadly, an all-too-common scenario. But instead of responding with advice, Jesus tells his questioner to not let his or her actions be guided by greed (v.15). He then goes to tell the story that is the main focus of our talk today.
- The story starts with a bountiful harvest. The weather conditions had obviously been right, the crops had been strong, there had been no devouring pests and, we are told in v.16, 'the land produced abundantly'.
- We are told that the farmer was already rich (v.16), but his first response isn't 'Do I really need to keep all this food for myself? Can I share some of it with others?' Instead, he starts to fret about storage space. He doesn't have barns big enough for this huge crop. So his thoughts turn to ripping down his existing barns and building even larger ones.
- Some might say that he was just being a wise steward by carefully storing away his crop to last out the lean times. We might want to wonder what we would have done in the same situation.
- The rich farmer seems very pleased with his plan (v.19) – the abundant harvest will see him through for a good few years and he won't need to worry about working. He seems to be really looking forward to relaxing, eating, drinking and being merry.
- Perhaps this sounds like an attractive proposition to many of us? Not having to work for our daily bread! Surely this man has won the lottery!
- But this is a parable, a story intended to illustrate a point. We remember the words of Jesus back in verse 15: 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.' This story has a sting in the tail and it comes in a dramatic way in verse 20 – God intervenes and tells the man that that very night he is going to die and there will be no need for all those stored goods.
- Then comes the moral of the story, the punchline as it were, in v.21: 'So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'
- As is common with parables told by Jesus, we have to reflect on how all this applies to us today. We might be feeling quite smug as we hear all this – we might think we are nothing like the rich farmer. And I'm sure many of us are more generous than him – we share our resources – we may give to charity or volunteer at our local food bank, we do our bit to support people in our community. (And if we don't and we're already feeling challenged by this story, there will be opportunities in this service to think more about our personal response).
- But what if we saw it a different way? Perhaps this parable is actually about our dependence on God. Our life itself, all that we have, all our worldly goods, ultimately come from God – as the Psalm we heard earlier puts it: 'The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.' (Psalm 67.6) In the ancient world, and even more recently in rural communities, people prayed to God for a good harvest and thanked him when it was all brought in safely – as the words of one of the traditional Harvest hymns put it: 'Come, ye thankful people, come/Raise the song of harvest home;/all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin./God our maker doth provide/for our wants to be supplied.'
- If we live in an urban area, it might be harder for us to be aware of the changing seasons and the precarious nature of growing food – although recent coverage of the impact of climate change on food production may have reminded us just how fragile our eco-system can be and how easily harvests can fail, causing shortages and even famines in parts of the world.

- This parable reminds us that it doesn't matter how much we store up for ourselves on earth – we can't take any of it with us. And as Jesus says in verse 15, our lives, our value as human beings, aren't determined by how much we have or own – or they shouldn't be if we are living as faithful followers of Christ.
- The parable also reminds us that we are to share what we have with people. We are not to 'store up treasures' for ourselves without a thinking about the rest of our community. This what 'being rich towards God' means (v.21).
- Many are struggling financially at the moment, particularly given the inadequacy of our social security system. Trussell recently reported a 50% increase in the demand for emergency food parcels, compared to pre-pandemic levels, and a 29% increase since 2021. Between April 2024 and May of this year (2025), food banks gave 2.9 million emergency food parcels – that's one every 11 seconds. Many people are asking for cold food, as they can't afford to heat their meals. We also know that parents are skipping meals in order to feed their children. As one person who had no option but to use a food bank put it, 'I do skip meals. The kids don't, but I do. I can go three days without eating. When I first started doing it, it was like, oh my goodness, I feel ill. Now I'm used to it.'
- Yet, as need has increased, unfortunately donations to food banks have decreased – which is leaving food banks in the Trussell network stretched and exhausted.
- Shortly, we'll have the opportunity to bring up our donations, whether food or financial, to help food banks to keep supporting people in their communities – especially as winter, and increased fuel bills, approach. All donations are massively appreciated.
- But we're also aware that this is a matter of social justice. Being 'rich towards God' means having values and taking action that align with God's purposes for the world. God loves and values each individual and it is surely not right that in a wealthy, developed country like our own (the fifth wealthiest in the world according to some lists) there are people in our communities who are pushed to the doors of food banks to feed themselves and their children. Trussell exists to give immediate support where it is needed, but also to campaign for a better future, where food banks are no longer needed.
- At the end of the service we'll have the opportunity to think about what more we might do to make positive changes in our society – whether that's through committing to giving a regular gift to Trussell, giving more of your time by volunteering at a food bank, or writing to your MP about the situation.
- So, this Harvest, while being thankful for all we have, let's also commit to 'being rich towards God' in prayer, in word and in deed.
- Let's close with a time of reflection and a prayer.

Hymn

God Of The Poor (Beauty For Brokenness) or The Servant Song (see list at end.)

Offering our gifts

During the final verses or an instrumental reprise, invite people to bring up their food donations or take a collection for the work of Trussell.

Thanksgiving prayer for the offering

Generous God, all things come from you

and of your own do we give you.

Thank you for these donated goods [or this collection].

We ask that each gift may be used wisely and may be of help to someone in need.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord of the Harvest,

we give thanks for your bountiful provision.

Thank you for the flowers of the field, for trees laden with fruit, for fields of wheat and barley.

We ask your blessing on all who grow, harvest and get food to us: the farmers, the pickers, the packers and the delivery drivers.

Lord of the Harvest,

Hear our prayer.

We pray for those who run food banks [especially our own local food bank(s)].

Thank you for all who volunteer their time to keep them going.

We pray that you would energise and inspire them when times are tough.

We also pray for everyone who is forced to use a food bank, that they may be sustained in body, mind and spirit.

Lord of the Harvest,

Hear our prayer.

Lord of the Harvest,

Lord of the Harvest,

we ask your blessing on the work of Trussell.

Thank you for all they do to support food banks [including our own local food bank(s)].

Give them wisdom as they campaign for change so that food banks and a UK without the need for food banks.

We also pray for those in government and all who have the power to bring about a future where we can all afford life's essentials.

May they be guided by values of justice and dignity for all.

Lord of the Harvest,

Hear our prayer.

Lord of the Harvest,

finally we pray for ourselves.

We offer ourselves to your service,

asking that by the Spirit at work in all of us,

together, we may receive a rich harvest of love and joy and peace.

Lord of the Harvest,

accept these prayers in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Action

As a response to the service and to what they have heard about the work of Trussell, invite everyone to add a prayer or commitment they will make moving forward onto a tablecloth, and display it in the church. You can order tablecloth packs via [Harvest Trussell tables](#).

Final hymn

For The Fruits Of His Creation or Great Is Thy Faithfulness (see list at end.)

Sending out

Freely you have received, freely give.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Harvest hymns and songs

Some suggestions for hymns and songs to accompany your harvest services and events

Harvest hymns

- *Come, Ye Faithful People Come*
- *For The Beauty Of The Earth*
- *For The Fruits Of His Creation*
- *Praise And Thanksgiving Father We Offer*
- *We Plough The Fields And Scatter*

Songs and hymns on the theme of justice

- *For The Healing Of The Nations* – Fred Kaan
- *Give Thanks With A Grateful Heart* – Don Moen
- *God Of The Poor (Beauty For Brokenness)* – Graham Kendrick
- *Jesus Christ Is Waiting* – John Bell and Graham Maule
- *In The Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful* - Taizé
- *The Kingdom Of God Is Justice And Joy* – William Croft
- *The Servant Song* – Richard Gillard
- *When I Needed A Neighbour* – Sydney Carter

Contemporary worship songs

- *Build Your Kingdom Here* – Rend Collective
- *God Of Justice* – Tim Hughes
- *Follow You* – Leeland

If you have found this resource helpful and want to receive updates from our Church Engagement team, including new resources to help you and your church join the fight against hunger, you can sign up at trussell.org.uk/join