

Hope outward

- ways to impact your community

The heart of HOPE is about you getting out into your community and sharing God's love in your words and actions. This section contains some great ideas that will help you maximise on harvest as a missional season, expressing your thankfulness in ways that will impact your urban or rural community. There are ideas that could be adapted for individuals, small groups, churches or groups of churches; some big, some small, but all which seek to bless those outside of the church. They may help you meet new people you've not come into contact with, or build relationships with those you already know. You might find ways to freshen up a traditional event you hold, or perhaps use this as an opportunity to try something totally new. On page < X > you'll also find some thoughts about how we communicate the good news of Jesus through our words as of course this is a vital part of our outreach. So get planning as early as you can to make the most of the opportunities around harvest, pray that your work will bear amazing fruit for God's kingdom and GO FOR IT!

You could use your event as an opportunity to understand more about your community's needs! See page <X> for more details. It's also a great idea to have a box easily available with some small cards where people can post prayer requests.

Harvest Festival Services

Many churches hold a harvest festival, providing an opportunity to thank God for all that he has provided. This is a great chance to involve the wider community in your service, perhaps by inviting local businesses (see page <X> for more details) or how about holding your celebration outside of the church walls so it's easily accessible for all? You could:

- Hold an outdoor harvest festival at your local allotments and invite local schools to come along.
- Hold a celebration at a local supermarket.
- Build a bread oven as a church community project and invite local residents along for a bread- or pizza-making afternoon before or after the Harvest Sunday service.
- Consider calling it a Thanksgiving service in order to make it more accessible to members of the community

How about using your harvest festival service as a chance to get people thinking about a lasting harvest? Ask people to consider what the harvest from their life will be, and to bring a symbol of this to the harvest service.

As part of your service, you may want to take up a food collection, please see below for more ideas around this.

Idea for small groups

Hold a meal at your house, inviting friends from outside of church, and giving everyone an opportunity to say what they are thankful for.

Prayer idea for harvest festival

Encourage everyone to bring a picture of either someone or something for which they want to give God thanks or to bring a short prayer of thanks. Invite them during the service to come up and put their pictures or prayers on a prepared wall or boards, then have a time of thanksgiving in prayer, sharing scriptures and song.

Food Collections

For many, harvest is traditionally associated with collecting non-perishable food items and donating them to people in need in the community.

Make the most of your food collection by:

- Speaking to local charities to ensure your collection goes to those in need. You might want to support projects working with people who are homeless or living in women's refuge centres. Speak to the local council who will know about families that might be in need of a care package.
- Find out what your chosen charity would find most useful to receive and give suggested shopping lists to your congregation a few weeks ahead of harvest.
- Encourage your congregation to change their thinking from 'buy one get one free' to 'keep one give one away' in the run up to harvest.

Alternatives

- Instead of bringing food you could ask people to donate the money they would have spent and support a project either close to home or overseas. Make sure people are clear about where the money is going and how much of a difference it will make to the lives of those in need.
- Ask your congregation to donate pieces of fresh fruit, make them into small gift baskets, then give these out on the local streets as an act of kindness.
- Donate your time to local projects instead of giving money or food.

Food Banks

Food banks collect donated goods to provide a minimum of three days' emergency food for individuals or families in crisis. With 13 million people in the UK living below the poverty line, there are many around the country in need of help and food banks can be a straightforward way of helping those in need.

If there's a food bank in your area consider supporting it, either by providing goods for their harvest collections (many food banks will have a list of helpful items to donate at harvest) or by sending volunteers to help sort the boxes and deliver them. If no food bank already exists, you could speak to the Trussell Trust about how you could set one up for your area, www.trusselltrust.org/foodbank-projects.

We asked one church in London about their experience running a food bank and here's what they told us.

Hillingdon Foodbank launched in 2009 and was the first Foodbank in London. It provides a breathing space, supporting individuals and families through the tough times by providing short term and emergency food supplies to families going through difficult times in the borough through a referral system from frontline professionals in the council, GP surgeries, social services, NHS and Job Centres.

How does it work?

Food is collected by volunteers from supermarkets, individuals, churches, school harvest and other organisations. It is sorted in the warehouse and banked ready for distribution to those in need. The Foodbank works in partnership with voluntary and statutory agencies which come into contact with people in crisis through the course of their work.

Partners issue vouchers which the clients bring to the Foodbank Centre and exchange for a week's worth of food. Three days is the period assessed as the minimum time it takes for agencies to be in a position to offer assistance. Realistically, we know that it may take longer so we will extend our support where appropriate.

As the client waits for their food to be packed, they will be offered a cup of tea or coffee and the opportunity to talk to a worker about their situation. Where appropriate, the worker may signpost the client to agencies that can provide specialist support and assistance.

Results

Hillingdon Foodbank has supported over eight hundred people in need in the Hillingdon Borough with food packs and supported the setting up of other food banks in the London area. The Hillingdon Foodbank was the Mayoral Charity of



the Year 2010/2011 in the borough. The Hillingdon Foodbank was also nominated for Hillingdon Local Heroes Award 2011 and was issued a certificate for Highly Commendable Community Champion to appreciate the good works it has done. Foodbank Services have received positive feedback from partners and clients who have benefitted from their services.

Examples of those helped locally are:

- A project manager whose team member committed suicide; he got sacked and had nothing.
- A 60-year-old British national who emigrated to live in the US for 40 years and was deported with nothing after his partner died. Foodbank helped with food and clothes.
- A returnee soldier from Afghanistan, hungry for 48 hours and separated from his family.
- A family who lost their home in a fire and needed emergency food.
- A family who lost their business due to the economic situation.
- Several people going through relationship and family problems.
- Individuals going through an adjustment period due to bereavement.
- Several people waiting for, or turned down for, crisis loans and about to go hungry.
- Several professionals made redundant and trying to get new jobs.
- Several single mums who were choosing between paying bills and feeding their children.
- Families with children struggling on one income or low incomes.
- People deep in debt and almost giving up were supported with food supply.

Turn some local wasteland into a garden which not only looks good but where food can be grown to give to local people in need. You could run simple teaching sessions alongside this on how to grow your own vegetables.

Harvest Suppers

Harvest is a brilliant time to bring your community together for a celebration. There are countless different ways you could make your harvest supper special as you welcome in members of the community; here are some things to consider:

Ideal for individuals, small groups, churches or groups of churches

Food

- You could grow the food yourselves, suggesting a menu and things for your congregation to plant ahead of the event.
- Why not eat a typical meal from the developing world but charge the typical price of a Western meal and donate the money to charity?
- Hold a 'bring and share' meal so the responsibility is split between everyone who comes.
- You could have a food tasting festival, inviting people to bring unusual or exotic dishes.

Costs

You may want to make the meal totally free as a blessing to your community or you could ask for donations and then split them between charities (e.g. a local Christian charity, a local project run outside of the church and an overseas project).

Venue

You could use your church, hire the village hall or make it an intimate event in your home and invite your neighbours. If the weather is warm enough, you could have a picnic or a party in the local park.

Entertainment

- Play games or run a quiz.
- Have a live band.
- Hold a ceilidh or barn dance.

As an alternative you may want to hold a café-style event with coffee, cakes, quizzes and games.

Community Survey of Thankfulness

Go door-to-door in your neighbourhood and ask residents what they are thankful for and what they most need.

- Use the data to inform future outreach projects.
- Use the opportunity to invite the people you speak to along to church.
- Use the data as part of your harvest service, giving an overview of what people in the area are thankful for and praying for their needs.
- You could use a response card if you don't have time to go door-to-door yourself.
- Ask people if they have any prayer requests that you can intercede for during harvest. You may want to leave them a postcard to fill in and drop back to you.

Or how about visiting local shops, businesses and schools in your community and asking individuals what they are thankful for about your area? Take photos of them and then create a display in your church of the photos and sound bites as a way of celebrating the harvest of the local area. You could also leave the people you speak to with an invitation to come and see the display and attend a harvest service.

Random Acts of Kindness

Why not take the opportunity to bless your friends, family and neighbours with an act of kindness?

- Leaf raking for neighbours.
- A week before the clocks change, drop cards round to local houses reminding them to change their clocks. You could also attach a small gift or offer to pray for them and their needs.
- Make cookies and cakes and hand them out in a public space. Also give out a bookmark giving thanks to God for all he gives us at harvest time and details of church services/Alpha courses running in the town.
- As a church take a market stall and donate money raised from produce sold to a local charity.
- Publish a free sheet and distribute locally with good-quality articles that members of the congregation are willing to give away free.
- Open up your church for an afternoon so people can come and see the harvest flower displays and share a cream tea.
- Offer to wash people's cars free of charge.

Prayer and Food!

Each day we eat foods from all around the world. Why not take up the challenge to count how many different foods from different places you eat in a day? Perhaps as a small group you could share your findings and pray for the places the food came from. Give thanks to God for all the people represented in the chain bringing that food to your plate. You could share the idea with colleagues and friends, or do the project with children.

You could hold a special night of prayer for drought-torn areas around the world and for UK farmers or find out more about where food is produced in the UK using www.goodfoodnetwork.com. You could use a map to trace where all your food comes from and use it as a prompt for prayer.

Ideas for Kids

Harvest musicals

There's a whole range of harvest musicals containing catchy songs and readings, aimed at different age groups from Key Stage 1 through to older teenagers.

All are available from www.redheadmusic.co.uk and are ideal for schools. Choose from:

- Harvest Praise!
- Harvest Rock!
- Harvestsong
- Harvest . . . It's a Little Bit CORNY!
- Lord of the Harvest! (great for older children and teenagers)

Or you could put on one of the musicals with your Sunday school and take it out into the community – perhaps in a shopping centre, a hospital, a retirement community, a local park or even a service station. Hand out song sheets so that everyone can join in, and perhaps give away something to eat or drink. You could have collection buckets to raise money for charity at the same time.

Further ideas

- Go on a nature walk and collect as many seeds as you can (conkers, acorns, berries, grasses, etc.). Identify them with the children and talk about sowing seeds and harvesting.
- Write prayers for those in need on fruit and vegetable cut outs.
- Support a charity that works overseas but also learn about how the charity helps people, where it works and the food and farming methods of the country.
- Put on a drama such as the one below discussing the importance of saying thank you:

Zac does not like getting up on a Saturday morning (. . . who does?). Mum calls him several times to come and get his breakfast. When he appears he refuses to say grace.

'Why should I say "thank you" to God for my toast? God didn't make my toast; Mum did.' Then [very begrudgingly] 'Thank you, Mum, for my toast.'

Mum refuses to accept the credit saying, 'All I did was to put the bread into the toaster. It's no good thanking me; you should thank the people at the Co-Op [or any other outlet] for the bread.'

So Zac goes to the Co-Op and says thank you to the baker who works in the

bread department, who says, 'It's no good thanking me; you need to thank the delivery man who brings the ingredients to make the bread' . . . who says, 'It's no good thanking me; you need to thank the miller who makes the flour' . . . who says, 'It's no good thanking me; you need to thank the farmer.'

Now the farmer goes to Zac's church. When Zac appears and makes his little speech, the farmer takes Zac to a field and tells him that all he does is sow the seed. God sends the sunshine and the rain, the day and the night, and God makes the seed grow. So, really, he needs to say 'thank you' to God . . . at which point you can explain that harvest is saying 'thank you' to God for all that he provides.

Creative ideas

- Squashing berries and using the juice to dye pre-cut banners to be hung in the church. (Make sure you know which berries to avoid!)
- Making bread.
- Flower arranging.
- Collages with autumn leaves, etc.

Community Prayer Treasure Hunt

A 60-minute adventure outside of your church building praying for your local community.

- Begin inside the church building. Prepare your hearts and minds before you start.
- Put people into small 'family teams' of different ages. Give each team a colour.
- Explain that there are clues hidden in plastic boxes around your local community. Colour coded envelopes, one for each team, are inside these boxes. No stealing or tampering with other team envelopes!
- Explain each team will be on a different route around the game, so their first clue will take each team to different starting prayer boxes.

Select from the following Prayer Box ideas to design your own prayer time or make up your own! Five or six boxes will probably be enough for a 60-minute timeframe. Teams will need time to walk between prayer stations. Choose carefully the geographical area to be used. Walk and time it ahead of the event!

Box 1: Faith like mustard seeds

Put this box outside a school or key building of influence. Inside, place mustard seeds in small bags, one for each team participating. Put an instruction sheet that says: 'Take the packet of seed for your team and divide it equally among yourselves. Jesus told us all we needed was faith the size of mustard seeds to remove obstacles to the kingdom! Examine the seed. Now each one of you spend 5 minutes sowing your prayers of faith for the school [or other place] where you are. Plant the seed or throw it to the wind. What will you dare to pray?'

Box 2: Jesus, the Bread of Life

Place this box in a place like a park or piece of grass. Put in enough slices of bread for each team. Either scatter bread in your local park for the birds or eat it yourself! Spend 5 minutes praying that there would be a growing hunger after truth in your community and knowing the purpose of life. Ask God for opportunities to share this bread (hope?) with others.

Box 3: The Lord's Prayer!

Make a photocopy of the famous model for praying that Jesus gave his disciples. Each person must choose a phrase or a line from it. Turn this line or phrase into a prayer as you walk to the next box. Teach the younger ones how to do this. For example, 'Our Father' – 'Thank you for being our Father, for being the Dad who loves the people in the home I am walking past. Bless them, Father . . .'

Box 4: Prayer shapes!

In this box write the instruction: 'Your task as a team is to make the word HOPE with your bodies! (Take a photo on your mobile to prove it later to the other teams!) Read out loud the scripture from Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." You could say this scripture a few times and make it a prayer for your community, changing the word "you" for the name of your town, village or city.'

Box 5: Egg-timer blessing

Place this box close to another church in the town or community. Write a note that says: 'Use the egg-timer! Turn it over to start the prayers. Pray all together as one, for as long as the timer lasts. Pray heaps of blessings upon that other church (leaders, youth, families, children, etc.) and see if you can last the time!'

Box 6: In the bag!

In this box place two or three pairs of rubber gloves and one black bin liner per team. Place this box in a street where there will be some minor rubbish to pick up. Instruction note: 'For 5 minutes use the gloves and bin liner to pick up bits of rubbish from the street. As some of the team do this everyone is to ask the Lord to send the

Holy Spirit to convict the community of the rubbish in our lives and to make people aware of the conscience and God's wonderful gift of repentance and new life in Jesus!

Idea provided by Andy Kennedy of King's Kids, YWAM England.

Harvest Labyrinth

A labyrinth reshapes a twelfth-century ritual for the twenty-first century. It is an ancient symbol which combines the imagery of the circle and spiral into a winding path, inviting anyone to slowly walk along the path, with different stopping points allowing personal reflection, interaction and prayer about their spiritual journey and their relationship with God, their community, our planet, etc. This could be laid out in a church or church hall, or put up alongside any community activity, e.g. a harvest supper. It can be done just for those within the church family or it can be modified to be used by anyone in the community.

You could do your labyrinth based on the journey of a grain of wheat to a loaf of bread, having stopping points which include a tray of soil, seeds to plant, watering and shining light on the soil, a growing plant, harvesting the wheat, grinding the wheat into flour, and a loaf of bread. At each point provide something to interact with, something to reflect on, something to do and something to pray. Use biblical texts to draw out implications with the seed to our spiritual journeys and where we are all at. For more details please visit the HOPE website www.hopetogether.org.uk.