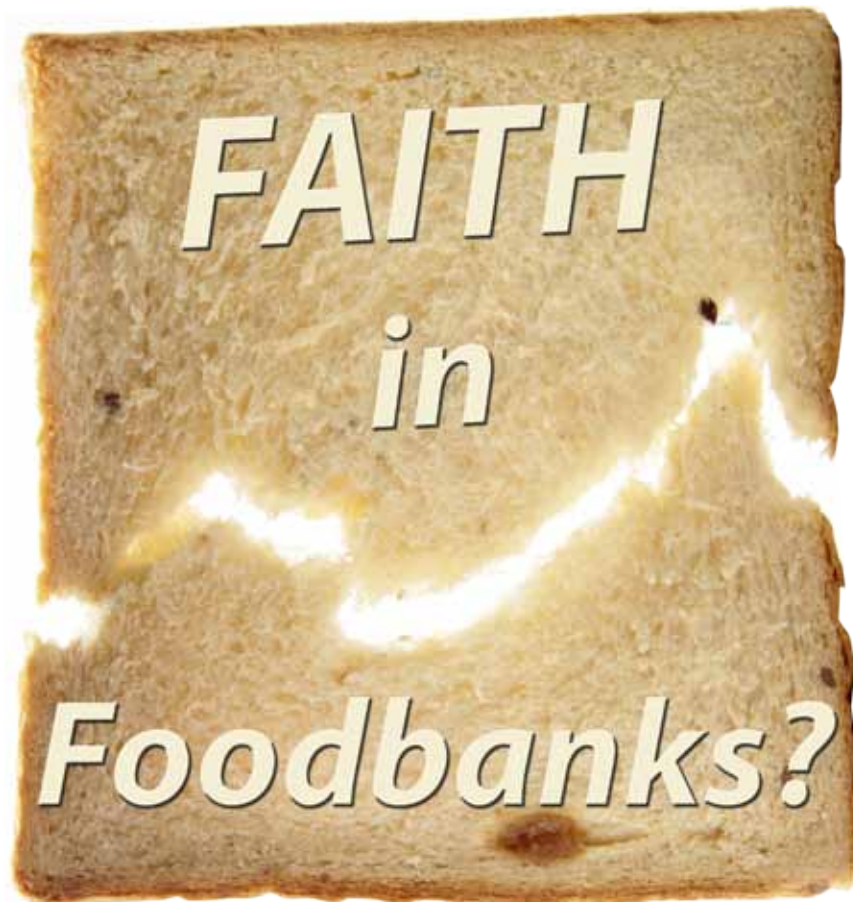


A resource from  
the Baptist Union of Great Britain,  
the Methodist Church,  
the United Reformed Church  
and Church Action on Poverty



# Worship Ideas



# Worship Ideas

Worship is our response to God's love for us. So is work done to tackle hunger, through foodbanks or through working to end injustice – we do this because we believe that God loves and values each human being. So it is right that we bring before God in worship the work that is done in God's name. Here are some ideas for ways in which you might resource your local congregation through worship.



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# Hold a Food Poverty Sunday

If your church is involved in supporting a foodbank, why not hold a special service to help the congregation bring what it is doing before God in worship? You could use some of the suggestions in this section, which includes ideas for a family service; sermon notes; prayers; and reflections.

You could also include dedication of food donated to the foodbank – maybe even wheel it up to the front in a supermarket trolley – and encourage people to take action, such as writing to their MP, over a simple shared meal after the service.



# Idea for a service structure

The Bible studies in this resource pack use the idea that foodbanks are a sign of the times. You can find images to illustrate these different signs at [www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/faihtinfoodbanks-resources](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/faihtinfoodbanks-resources), and could even structure your service along these lines:

**Confession:** Foodbanks are a sign that the world is not as God intended it to be

**Thanksgiving:** Foodbanks are a sign that we have a vision of a world that is better

**Prophetic:** Foodbanks are a sign of deeper questions that we need to ask

**Intercession:** Foodbanks are a sign that God's people are called to transform our world

**Gospel:** Foodbanks are a sign that the Gospel is expressed in practical reality

**Commission:** Foodbanks are a sign that we share a common humanity



# Hold a family service

## 'The Great Sandwich Contest'

Provide some basic ingredients and get two congregation members to make 'the ultimate sandwich'. Invite a panel of judges to decide which is the best. While the judges are tasting, invite the congregation to reflect on how many people are involved in creating just a simple sandwich – e.g. the farmer who grew the wheat, baker who made the bread, retailer who sold the bread, dairy farmer who made the butter, cutler who made the knife to spread the butter, delivery driver, public health inspector checking that the food is produced safely and so on. We cannot have food without community: even if we have an allotment and grow our own food, we rely on the seed-provider, the person who designed and made the spade, etc.

But of course for all of this, our food also relies on God. Psalm 104 reminds us of the cycle of nature which begins when God pours the water on the mountains. (Psalm 104: 13-15)

*From your lofty abode you water the mountains;  
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.  
You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to use,  
to bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the human heart,  
oil to make the face shine,  
and bread to strengthen the human heart.*



These may just be sandwiches, but they are a sign to us of our relationship with God and our relationship with one another.

Ask judges to announce results.

If eating a sandwich can speak to us about being in relationship with God and our fellow human beings, what does it say to us when we have to do without food? What does it say to us about a society where things are organised in a way that some are deprived of food, while others can make massive profits from its production and distribution?

The links and relationships identified provide opportunities for exploitation and abuse. God speaks powerfully against this. For example

*Do not rob the poor because they are poor,  
or crush the afflicted at the gate; (Proverbs 22:22)*

*Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from  
the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been  
robbed. (Jeremiah 22:3)*

*Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,  
but those who are kind to the needy honour him.  
(Proverbs 14:31)*

When someone's access to food is disrupted, then their place and identity in society can also be disrupted.



Our foodbank is a way of reminding ourselves and showing our world that food justice is important. We recognise our relationship with other human beings, and want our sharing of food to be a blessing to others, rather than a means of exploitation.

But as we do this, we also have to ask deeper questions. Why are people without food in the first place? We might wonder if this is important, but in several places in the Old Testament God speaks to his people right at the heart of their worship – for example:

*Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice...  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry...  
(Isaiah 58: 2-7)*

*Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and  
grain offerings,  
I will not accept them;...  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!  
(Amos 5:22 & 24)*

*When you stretch out your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen;...  
cease to do evil, learn to do good;  
seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan,  
plead for the widow.  
(Isaiah 1:15-17)*

'The worship I want is justice for the poor – bread for the hungry' is how we might summarise God's desire. God was not simply asking worshippers to share their daily bread – he was addressing their life as a nation, their economic systems and laws. They were allowing the poor to be oppressed and the stranger to go hungry and God was asking why. God was calling for change. God was warning that a society that ignored these things did not have a future.

It is amazing to think that a simple sandwich connects us to so many people – in a similar way, our foodbank connects us to a lot of issues and questions that God himself is often found to be asking.

Later in the service, younger children could be helped to make crackers and snacks with the leftover sandwich ingredients – using some music and Scripture or perhaps a worship song. The children could share their 'feast' – and as people receive and share food, we can reflect on how God invites us to share in his great banquet of love and justice, and also that he extends that invitation to the least.

**Remember** that our actions speak as loud as our words, so please think about how you deal responsibly with the unused ingredients from the sandwich contest.

# Sermon Suggestions

## Reading – Genesis 41:46-57

*Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance - like the sand of the sea - that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure. Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." The second he named Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."*

*The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.*



There are some clear differences between what Joseph did and the work of a foodbank – not least because he charged people for the grain that they received. But at the same time we cannot help but notice some resonances, as a hungry nation finds relief through a programme of which God and his people are at the heart. What Joseph had arranged was a re-distribution of the surplus from a situation of plenty to make provision for those in need. Joseph took these simple principles of sharing and stewardship and developed them into a national network of organised centres, particularly based in major cities. This sermon outline explores these similarities and differences as a way of applying the story to our context today.

## Sharing and stewardship is to be commended:

At the heart of this story is a very simple formula – be prudent in times of plenty so that there is provision in times of need. Joseph applied this principle across the land of Egypt, but the story makes clear that he is applying the principles and realities that God has shown him. Part of the ministry of foodbanks is to help us be better stewards of what God has given us, and to promote generosity and sharing. These are things that lie close to God's heart for his creation.

## The power of foresight:

Pharaoh had one key advantage – he knew the famine was coming so was able to put measures in place. But he only knew this because he was willing to take some very serious risks. The story is told from the perspective of Joseph, but when we look at things from Pharaoh's point of view, we can see how radical his actions were. In summary, the ruler of one of the most powerful nations in the world was willing to restructure his entire economic policy around the advice of a foreign slave who was serving a prison sentence for a sex offence (albeit under false accusation). We have to recognise that the needs and inequalities exposed by foodbanks are the consequence of prevailing economic measures and policies. Today's politicians may argue that they haven't got a 'Joseph' to tell them what to do, but God's Word makes plain his expectations of a just, fair and generous society. The task of today's church is to follow Joseph's example and to speak God's truth into situations of power and influence.

### **The nature of community prosperity:**

The story makes plain that the famine impacted the whole land, and beyond. Although a troubling event, it affected everyone equally, but because of Joseph's interventions, everyone was able to benefit and prosper throughout that period. Most of the issues of food justice that we face today do not come about because of widespread shortage, or because it is beyond our means to re-distribute to those in need, but because of inequality and injustice. The cycle of plenty and famine would have provided opportunities for some to prosper at the expense of others, to exploit need and pursue personal interest. Joseph and Pharaoh pursued the common good, and were able to benefit others. While foodbanks are a symbol of that principle of common good, they are also a sign of the inequality that prevails in our own nation; while some in our land are paid six-figure bonuses, others do not have the money to buy the food they need. How do the actions of Joseph and Pharaoh challenge this reality?

### **Our common humanity:**

In the middle of describing a national economic programme, the story teller returns the focus to Joseph and his immediate family (vv 50-52) to tell us how the years of plenty coincide with the birth of Joseph's children. This interjection underlines for us that in a human sense Joseph could be described as having 'arrived' – underlined not only by the gift of two sons, but the meaning attached to their names. But Joseph was a man on a mission, he knew what it was to be forgotten and exploited, and there is an interesting contrast here between Joseph and Pharaoh's cupbearer (see chapter 40) who, once reinstated, largely forgot about his former cell-mate. Joseph was not content to rest on his own good fortunes, but recognised that he had a responsibility to see the project through. Whether a foreign slave, victim of wrongful conviction, or civic dignitary, Joseph was the same person – his identity was not determined by his circumstances but the person God had made him. There are some significant parallels here: in the average congregation, we are likely to be a fair social mix, some may have enjoyed economic success and prosperity, others may well be struggling. We must resist the values of a society that places worth on people according to their wealth and position and recognise what it truly means to be 'one in Christ'. Like Joseph, our foodbank challenges the idea that anyone can consider their own success as a reason to ignore

their responsibility to others. It is also important to recognise that whatever circumstances result in someone using the services of a foodbank, their human worth and dignity is not defined by them. Foodbanks are an opportunity not simply to meet another's need, but to express and share our common humanity.

### **God's greater purposes prevail:**

Throughout this story there is a deeper narrative running. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would become a nation. Through the action of his brothers, Joseph had become outcast from that family, and the following chapter reveals that through the famine the remainder of the family were under threat of starvation. Through these events the family was preserved and God's promise prevailed. Our foodbanks can serve as a sign of that deeper promise of life and hope that is ours in Christ. We should never engage in the work of a foodbank with ulterior motives, or as a means to different end, but seeking how God might use this work to bring further hope, promise and possibility into the lives of those we serve through them. Our foodbank can be a platform for other acts of justice and mercy.



# Prayers

## Thanksgiving

Generous and righteous God

We thank you for food  
Which satisfies our needs and sustains our bodies  
Reminding us that you are the source and provider  
of all things.

We thank you for taste and texture, sweet and  
savoury  
Through which food brings us pleasure and  
fulfilment  
Reminding us of the richness of your goodness and  
grace

We thank you for hospitality  
Where shared food and warm conversation  
Reminds us of the generous welcome that is ours  
in you

We thank you and pray that in sharing our bread  
Through the work and ministry of this foodbank  
Or by simply responding to the needs we  
encounter

We might help others see more of you **AMEN**



## Confession

God of mercy and compassion,

We confess that at times we do not treat food as  
we should.

We take it for granted, and forget to be thankful for  
your provision;

We celebrate our plenty, with insufficient thought  
for those who do without;

We complain too easily when we cannot have what  
we desire;

We enjoy the fruits of others' labour, without  
always asking if it has been fairly sourced;

We celebrate its convenience, while others struggle  
to obtain enough.

We demand value and choice as the right of  
consumers,

But forget that our place in creation is as carers and  
stewards.

Help us we pray to obtain food, to eat food, to  
share food,

In ways that reflect the true values of your  
Kingdom

Give us an appetite for Justice in equal measure

To that through which we satisfy our body's needs  
and desires

Through Christ who invited all to pray for daily  
bread **AMEN**





### Intercession/Commission

God at whose bidding the earth came into being  
 Who promised and provides seedtime and harvest  
 Who is faithful and loving to all he has made

**Give us this day our daily bread**

Christ whose food was to do the will of the one  
 who sent you  
 Inspire our hearts with desire to serve your  
 purposes  
 That through us the poor and oppressed may be  
 released

**Give us this day our daily bread**

Bread of life, Word made flesh  
 Make your truth known in places where injustice  
 prevails  
 Speak through us to challenge greed and  
 inequality

**Give us this day our daily bread**

God and Father of all humanity  
 May we welcome those whom others might call  
 stranger  
 So that in plenty or need, no-one need be  
 excluded

**Give us this day our daily bread**

### Intercession

Living Christ,  
 Who felt the pangs of hunger in the wilderness,  
 We pray for all who don't know where tomorrow's  
 food will come from,  
 And for all who will go hungry so that others might  
 eat.  
 May their hunger be ended, and their needs be  
 filled.

Loving Christ  
 Who provided for the crowd on the hillside,  
 We pray for all who are involved in foodbanks,  
 Seeking to show your love and compassion.  
 Give them strength to be your hands in the world.

Living Christ  
 Whose hands reached out to the outcast and the  
 stranger,  
 We pray for all feeling stigmatised and blamed for  
 their hunger,  
 For all who are labelled skiver or scrounger.  
 May you surround them with your unquestioning  
 love.

Loving Christ  
 Who called out against injustice,  
 We pray for those who seek a fair and just system  
 for all,  
 Challenging inequality and prejudice.  
 Give us all the strength to speak words of wisdom  
 and truth.

We ask these prayers in your name **AMEN**

### A prayer of blessing for donations

Generous Lord,  
 Giver of abundant life,  
 From little you fed many  
 Yet in our world of excess many go hungry.  
 Teach us all to take no more than we need  
 And share with all who are left without.  
 Bless this food and bless those who need it and eat  
 it.

Through your name **AMEN**

# Bread: a reflection

*From there [Jesus] set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go - the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

Mark 7:24-30

This passage is extraordinary in so many ways. For a start, it's a miracle that it ever made it into the Gospels (it's here in Mark and in Matthew too if slightly changed). Frankly, it doesn't reflect well on Jesus. Does Jesus really call a woman a dog? And does he actually get bettered in argument by a woman? And did Jesus really change his mind about his mission, moving from domestic to global, because of a Gentile woman?

In Matthew's Gospel, the big issue that seems to lurk behind almost every story is the one about whether Jesus came only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, or whether he was sent to the Gentiles. Right from the beginning, from the genealogy and the wise men 'from the East' up to the ending with the great commission, Matthew is keen to tell his readers that Jesus is the Messiah for the whole world. So that's the lens through which we have become used to reading this story. And it's an important one. But Mark keeps on telling us to think about the bread – and this story is full of bread, or at least full of crumbs. And it always reminds me of that prayer in the Church of England communion service about picking up the crumbs from under the table, the prayer of humble access.

So what could it mean to think about the bread? We need to use our imaginations for a while here, because bread (from cheap white sliced to posh artisan) is in plentiful supply in the world in which most of us live. Unless we're old enough to remember the days of rationing then we take bread for granted. But in the ancient world, of course it was quite different. The provision of bread was highly politicised and contentious. There was very little stability in the food markets and a great deal depended on a good harvest. Even elite Romans, living in Rome itself, sometimes relied on importing grain from Egypt, particularly



in years when the local harvests were not good. When you thought about where bread came from you didn't mean the corner shop or Tesco's – you meant which corner of the Empire. If there was any sort of surplus of food to sell, the competition to have control of it was absolutely ruthless. And few people could feel safe from famine.

It's been suggested that Jesus' conversation here with the woman from Syro-Phoenicia about 'bread being given to the dogs' was actually a reference to the ways in some people had power over bread. The politics of bread was very volatile indeed in the ancient world. The woman might have been rather a rich woman, from the elite, since she is a Syrophenician. And they were in Tyre, a region which didn't have much of its own agriculture, but which imported grain from Galilee, so much so that there wasn't much left for the indigenous population of Galilee. The children of Galilee then have to eat the leftover crumbs from the rich folk of Tyre. And this woman may be eating her daily bread at the cost of the labour and hunger of rural Jewish peasants. So Jesus may be saying something like, "It's not right to take the food of the poor and throw it to the rich Gentiles in the cities".



But the woman talks back and she speaks from her situation in which she, rich though she and her people are, remain poor in others. She would welcome any crumbs of healing that Jesus has left over from the healing he is giving his own people. Perhaps what the woman does most effectively is to undercut the usual kinds of fixed ideas about who is poor and who is rich, who has the table laden and who has empty hands. Even those rich in faith, may be hungry for bread. And even those with full bellies may have empty souls. While in some ways the Gentile 'dogs' look rich and well fed, in others they need the crumbs from even the humblest of their Jewish neighbours.

The woman rejects what you might call a kind of binary pair of Jew and Gentile, or of poor and rich, as she points out that the places of giver and receiver may sometimes change and certainly that this relationship may be more complex than it first appears. She and Jesus stand together in kind of boundary land, where the usual kinds of assumptions and distinctions begin to fall away. All that matters is human need. Those who are usually thought to be those who have plenty and might even give, might suddenly become the vulnerable and the needy. And those usually thought to have been emptied out and poor become those who have something to give.

So – what is the meaning of the bread? Why does bread feature so strongly as a symbol of life, of God's gift, of economic justice, of God's presence with us, of miracle, sacrament, controversy and mystery? What is the significance of this? Perhaps its power as symbol lies in its ability to show us that the things we work so hard to keep apart, to frame as opposites or as completely different, are actually profoundly linked. Bread symbolises BOTH basic human hunger and the economic systems that go to fulfil it or deny it AND the deepest mystery of the presence of God with us. Bread is both the familiar taste of home and the intriguing aromas of a strange and different place. Bread is both what we long for in famine and what we celebrate with at a feast. Bread is both the dried up crust of the prisoner, and the enriched dough of Christmas and Epiphany.

Revd Dr Susan Durber, Theology Co-ordinator,  
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## More Prayers

You can find more prayers and reflections at [www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/faithinfoodbanks-resource](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/faithinfoodbanks-resource) and we will be adding to these over time. If you have anything you would like to suggest, please send it to [enquires@jointpublicissues.org.uk](mailto:enquires@jointpublicissues.org.uk)

## 10 things your congregation can do after a service

- 1 **Invite someone from your congregation who you don't know well round for a meal** – eating together is a great way to get to know people
- 2 **Bake cakes or biscuits for some of your neighbours** – food forms bonds
- 3 **Donate food to your local foodbanks** – add something to your shopping list each time you go shopping
- 4 **Cut back on fast food, chocolate, alcohol ... and give the money to a charity campaigning to tackle the causes of food poverty** – such as Church Action on Poverty ([www.church-poverty.org.uk](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk))
- 5 **Buy own-brand foods from supermarkets ... and give the money you save to a charity feeding hungry people** – perhaps your local foodbank or the Trussell Trust ([www.trusselltrust.org](http://www.trusselltrust.org))
- 6 **Visit the blog of the West Cheshire foodbank** (<http://westcheshire.blogspot.co.uk>) – find out the stories behind why people have to visit foodbanks
- 7 **Write to your MP** to express your concern at the growth of food poverty and hunger – a template letter is available at: [www.church-poverty.org.uk/wtb](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/wtb)
- 8 **Reduce the amount of food you waste** – reuse it tomorrow, freeze it, buy only what you need
- 9 **Try to shop ethically** – locally, fairly-traded and using lower 'food miles' (how far your food travels to reach you)
- 10 **Are you ready to eat? Then thank God!**

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**For further information:**

[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk)



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