

# Education for All Hope for All



Leaders' Notes



Methodist Women  
in Britain

for women, for justice, for Christ

The Methodist Church 

## Introduction

Welcome to this year's Easter Offering Service. This service follows a tradition of fundraising begun nearly 140 years ago to raise money for Methodist Women Missionaries. Today's collections, along with our prayers, support Partner Churches around the world.

The theme of this year's service, 'Education for All, Hope for All', focuses on the right of every person to receive an education. It includes stories from Britain and the wider world that show how people and Methodist Partner Churches have changed lives through their commitment to education. The theme has been inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Climate Action (SDG 13).

This service is a gift from Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) to the whole Church; an act of worship, but also an opportunity to hear stories and respond with our money, our prayers and our lives. Each year a different woman takes up the task of being the lead writer. The 2025 service has been written primarily by Ruth Parrott, MWiB Co-Chair North, assisted by the Easter Offering Task Group.

These notes should give you everything you need to explore the theme as well as prepare for the service itself. You may also want to use the Lent reflections available at: [mwib.org.uk](http://mwib.org.uk) Please read through both the Order of Service and these resource notes to ensure you have everything you need in advance.

## Before the Service

- Arrange for the Easter Offering envelopes to be distributed (with the accompanying bookmarks) in each church in your circuit during Lent, and particularly on Easter Sunday.
- Ensure that church and circuit treasurers have a copy of the guidelines/finance instructions included in these notes and on the Methodist Church website.
- Use the A3 posters available from Methodist Publishing ([methodistpublishing.org.uk/features/easter-offering-2025](http://methodistpublishing.org.uk/features/easter-offering-2025)) to advertise the service. Remember to complete the section showing when and where your service will take place. Smaller A4 posters can be downloaded from [methodist.org.uk/EasterOffering](http://methodist.org.uk/EasterOffering)
- Advertise your service in your local church magazines. Let everyone know they are welcome.
- Contact your MWiB District Trustee with details of your service, so that this information can be included in the list of all local services in your district.

Please photocopy any part of this document you need for your service. We have included ideas that can be used in all-age settings, or as part of a more creative session. Please feel free to use these as best suits your local context.

## Order of Service

### Gathering prayer

During this prayer, the tune from the previous hymn might be played quietly.

### Reflection on the Reading

You may wish to invite a speaker to say something at this point in the service. Alternatively you may want to play some quiet music and give the congregation time to reflect on their own. If you wished to use this time for discussion in small groups, questions are included in the additional resources below.

These notes on the Bible passage could form the backbone of a talk in the service, a sermon or a Bible study. They look at the text in more detail and can be used 'as is' – but they can also be supplemented with your own thinking and illustrations.

The age-worn passage from Luke 10 about Martha and Mary is a story which maybe tells us about girls' learning. But as we look at the story anew, it is an opportunity for us to be learners ourselves and re-think the things we have learned in the past.

1. Ask people how this story makes them feel. For people who first learned this story in the 1950s and '60s, the initial response on reading it has often been one of indignation. Here is a woman trying her best and getting (publicly) criticised for it by a man – who no doubt intends to sit down later to enjoy the fruits of her labour!

Do people recognise themselves or people they have loved in this story? They might know the resentment of time stolen by thankless tasks, or constantly failing to please. Generations of women have been beset by drudgery. (But not just women! Your congregation will be able to think of many men's lives which have been devoid of opportunity.) In some parts of the world the demands of everyday living mean that women and girls don't get time to finish their schooling – they are busy with chores while others enjoy learning. Or maybe their gender casts them into a role which makes the cost of education an unnecessary luxury in their family. Or maybe they live within a culture where some people decide who gets to learn (see Malala factsheet and colouring-in sheet). It is surprising to reflect how resistant powerful people in Britain were to schooling for the 'lower classes' (see Story 1: Hannah Ball). It's only since 1870 that the state has believed it had a role in providing schooling for all. Even in Britain, access to education for all is astonishingly recent – especially higher education. There may be people in the congregation whose grandparents just squeaked into an age of free schooling...

In this context we see the words of Jesus, which praise the way Mary has chosen to spend her time, as a powerful defence of people who want to learn. For the purposes of this Easter Offering, it lays down a marker for women's education. One commentator said that growing up, her mother was always telling her to come and help with the housework – this story was the way she argued for time to do her homework and forge her own path, through study, to a successful and prosperous career. (We don't know what her mother thought of this excuse!)

In fact commentators point out that, by sitting at the feet of a Rabbi, Mary's behaviour was unconventional. Women were not permitted to do 'this sort of thing'. In a sense, it should be Mary getting told off, not Martha! So we can take this story further: it is not just a story endorsing women having the opportunity to learn. Rather, it could be seen as a story which praises the emancipation of women: Martha can be seen as representing those attitudes that hold women back, while Jesus stands out as the feminist in this story. Can we see more in this? Might Jesus here be encouraging those whose search for truth and life's fullness leads them to break with stereotypes and convention?

This is radical stuff and about much more than housework! Jesus said that he was not only offering us new wine, but also that we would need new wineskins to put it in. Is our understanding of the 'new wine' of this story limited by the 'old wineskins' of our conventional thinking?

2. Now invite the congregation to look at the story again. This is the opportunity not just to think about learning but to be learners ourselves. One aspect of learning about the Bible is to look more closely at the text itself. Another is to acknowledge the lenses through which we look at the text – the way that our own experiences and the Church's tradition shape our understanding of a Bible passage. Remind the congregation that we can't always be certain what a story is 'about' and that our Bible study may not lead us to any firm conclusions.

Invite the congregation to consider their own lenses: a female/male; young/old; 20th/21st-century perspective? What else?

Now look at the story afresh. (It may help to have Bibles at hand, or have the text on the screen). Looking again, what strikes them? What are they curious about?

Here are some things to draw out:

- Are we perhaps surprised that there is a Bible story at all about the unimportance of housework? Martha is busy and anxious, but why do we assume this is about domestic chores? The Greek text actually says 'service', using the word *diakonia* from which we get our word 'deacon', for example. In the early Church and some New Testament texts it developed into a word more commonly used to describe a formal role of service rather than jobs around the home. Could it be that Jesus is talking about her work as a follower of Jesus here? Have the historic prejudices of translators about what women should/should not do in the church and at home coloured our understanding? Is this story really about different types of work, and the balance between them?
- Jesus praises Mary's choice of "the better part" (v 42) – but what actually is this? We are told that Mary sits at the feet of Jesus and learns from him, but that doesn't necessarily mean that this is the "better part" – that's just an assumption. Indeed, some commentators have asked whether Mary is actually present in the house at the time. Maybe she was called to a way of Christian discipleship that took her away from home – maybe both women are workers for the gospel and Martha's complaint is that Mary is swanning off somewhere while Martha has to pick up the more humdrum responsibilities.
- Martha is a woman of some substance, it is 'her door' and seems to be her house. We are often told that women could do, be or own practically nothing in biblical times, but there are no other men in this story (not even the somewhat liminal Lazarus!). We know from Luke 8 that the ministry of Jesus was enabled by the practical and financial support of women, and here we see that in action. Martha opens her home to Jesus and demonstrates the important early church practice of hospitality. Noting this also draws our attention to other questions about the other characters in this story:

- the disciples – where have they gone?
- Jesus – why is he on his own?
- Martha and Mary – this story is possibly set in Galilee. We also meet a Martha and Mary in John's Gospel, living near Jerusalem. Are we right if we assume it is the same people?

3. What have we learned by unpicking this story, to question our assumptions? To recognise that we do not come 'neutral' to Scripture? That different peoples and periods do not always see stories through the same lens? That we don't all have to see the Bible story in the same way for it to be important to us? That learning often opens up new possibilities rather than closing down our thinking?

If so, what can we take away from our learning? Here are some ideas to develop with your congregation:

- We can go back to our original focus on the value of carving out opportunity for all to learn – that remains a good message!
- We can use this story as a plumbline to ask questions about our religious life – as individuals or as a church. How do we balance the life of service and worship? In reality, we know that we all need each other, as St Paul says (1 Corinthians 12). Mary needs Martha.
- The words of Jesus echo down the centuries: "you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed – indeed only one" (Luke 10:40, NRSVue), and that's the thing that lasts. Telling people not to worry is not a good way to stop them worrying! But Jesus is inviting us to lean into God, and to shift our focus to the security of God's everlasting love. We might finish with the words of Deuteronomy: "... and underneath are the everlasting arms" (33:27, NIV). Or Isaiah: "Do not fear, for I am with you" (41:10, NRSVue). To use a modern idiom, it is an invitation to not 'sweat the small stuff' but to focus on God's big picture.

## Dramatised reading

A dramatised reading for eight voices. To make a congregational reading, the whole congregation could be Voice 2.

Please see notes on related colouring-in sheet.

## Prayers of Intercession

During the prayers of intercession, please feel free to add people and places pertinent to your own community and locality. If there are any members of your congregation with lived experience of this theme, you may want to ask them to contribute to prayers or share their story.

You may wish to research a topic that prevents women and children from receiving an education such as gender equality, poverty, climate change, early marriage etc and add this to the prayers of intercession.

## Alternative Hymns

The hymns in the Order of Service are taken from *Singing the Faith*, but we understand you may wish to have different songs, particularly if you use different song books in your church.

<b>StF 702</b>	I will speak out for those who have no voices
<b>StF 527</b>	Pray for a world where every child
<b>StF 485</b>	When we are living, we are in the Lord
<b>StF 417</b>	We come from the mountains
<b>StF 398</b>	There's a spirit in the air,
<b>StF 297</b>	Christ is alive!
<b>StF 57</b>	Let all the world in every corner sing
<b>StF 239</b>	Sent by the Lord am I
<b>StF 725</b>	As the glory of creation
<b>StF 726</b>	Come to us creative Spirit
<b>StF 4</b>	Father in heaven
<b>StF 42</b>	O sing to the Lord
<b>StF 75</b>	From all that dwell below the skies
<b>StF 92</b>	Think of a world (parts 2 and 3)

## Additional Resources

### Colouring-in Sheet

A colouring-in sheet themed on the life of educational campaigner Malala Yousafzia is available to download at [methodist.org.uk/EasterOffering](http://methodist.org.uk/EasterOffering)

You may wish to distribute this before or after the dramatised reading, which touches on the life and story of Malala.

### Discussion Questions

- How do daily activities for girls in our country compare to those in Afghanistan or another developing country?
- Look at the Sustainable Development Goals at [globalgoals.org](http://globalgoals.org). How many issues have an impact on women and children's learning? Why?

### Useful Websites

Some organisations that can help you explore this:

- World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women: [wfmucw.org](http://wfmucw.org)
- All We Can: [allwecan.org.uk](http://allwecan.org.uk)
- United Nations: [un.org](http://un.org)
- Unicef: [unicef.org](http://unicef.org)
- International Methodist Schools: [worldmethodistcouncil.org/international-association-of-methodist-schools-college-and-universities](http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/international-association-of-methodist-schools-college-and-universities)
- CEPALC: [cepalc.com](http://cepalc.com)
- Malala Fund: [malala.org](http://malala.org)
- UN Sustainable Development Goals: [globalgoals.org](http://globalgoals.org)

### Videos

- 'A Day in the Life of a Child in Afghanistan', BBC Newsround: [youtube.com/watch?v=VsyYaNrhAIY](http://youtube.com/watch?v=VsyYaNrhAIY)
- 'Malawi: A Story of Independence', All We Can: [allwecan.org.uk/malawi-a-story-of-independence](http://allwecan.org.uk/malawi-a-story-of-independence)

## Copyright

All hymns included in the PowerPoint presentation come with an indication of copyright status. If you intend to print the words to any hymns still in copyright, please add your own church Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) and/or Calamus numbers to the final slide at the end of the presentation.

Ensure that the digital display/downloading of hymns is reported in your church's CCLI returns. Otherwise, you could simply put the name and number of the hymns on the PowerPoint and the congregation can use their own hymn books.

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## Finance/Gift Aid

**Please read through and ensure these instructions are passed to your church treasurer, Gift Aid secretary and, importantly, the circuit MWiB treasurer.**

Instructions for collecting Gift Aid and sending in donations using the Easter Offering collection envelopes can be downloaded as a separate sheet from the Methodist Church website: [methodist.org.uk/GiftAid](http://methodist.org.uk/GiftAid)

These instructions apply to individual church collections. However, we recognise that most Easter Offering services are held as circuit-wide dedication services, in which case local churches may take a separate collection, with donations being received by circuit officers.

In keeping with the HMRC guidance with respect to best practices on handling and banking donations, we recommend the following options for collecting and sending in donations using the Easter Offering collection envelopes.

Local Methodist churches are able to claim Gift Aid on their Easter Offering, either by using our Gift Aid Bureau Service, directly from HMRC or through another third party churches may use to claim Gift Aid, if the following conditions are met:

1. Local churches bank these donations into their accounts.
2. Local churches forward the Gift Aid money to the World Mission Fund.

This advice to Methodist churches for claiming Gift Aid on their Easter Offering is therefore based on the understanding that local churches have exercised their discretion to set up a fund to support the World Mission Fund.

HMRC guidelines on church collections and Gift Aid are available on the GOV.UK website via [bit.ly/churchcollections](http://bit.ly/churchcollections)

## OPTION 1

### A. Collecting donations AND Gift Aid

1. In the same way that other special collections are received (eg All We Can, MHA or Christian Aid) please ask your church officers (Gift Aid secretaries or equivalent) to collect the sealed and completed Easter Offering collection envelopes (with cash/ cheque donations enclosed) received from their congregation. The envelopes should then be opened, and the total sum handed to the church treasurer (or equivalent) to pay the donations into the church bank account.
2. If the church has received and banked the donations into the church bank account, the church officers are to keep the empty Easter Offering collection envelopes for audit purposes and include banked donations on their church's Gift Aid claim form that is submitted to the Gift Aid Bureau Service.\* These envelopes should NOT be sent to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House unless your church is unable to claim Gift Aid (see Option 2). Each church should keep these envelopes for six years, in line with Gift Aid record-keeping requirements.

**We would encourage all churches to adopt this option where possible in order to claim Gift Aid on donations.**



## B. Sending in donations to the World Mission Fund

Once a church has collected and banked their donations into the church bank account, they can then do one of the following:

- The church treasurer can write a cheque, made payable to 'Methodist Church World Mission Fund' for the total amount donated (a further cheque will need to be sent when the Gift Aid amount is refunded). The cheque for donations made can then be brought (or sent) to the MWiB Treasurer at the circuit-wide Easter Offering dedication service. All cheques should then be collected by circuit MWiB treasurers and banked using the 'O2' paying-in books.
- If churches cannot get in touch with their circuit MWiB treasurer, cheques may be sent to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House with a covering letter indicating the circuit's name and ID number, so that those donations can be properly attributed.
- Alternatively, the total donation can be paid by BACS transfer directly into the World Mission Fund account using the following information:  
Sort code: 40-02-06  
Account number: 70951706  
If making a payment using this method, be sure to include your circuit reference followed by 02. For example circuit number 18/9 would use the reference 180902. If there is space, please also include your circuit name. This information ensures that your donation is attributed to the correct circuit.

\*The Gift Aid Bureau Service of the Methodist Church processes Gift Aid claims for about 4,000 churches every year, reclaiming about £10m from HRMC on behalf of those churches. Once processed, the Bureau Service will transfer the relevant Gift Aid rebate to each church.

## OPTION 2

If the church is unable to claim Gift Aid through the Gift Aid Bureau Service, or if cheques have already been made payable to the World Mission Fund, then follow the instructions below:

### Collecting donations

- Church officers (Gift Aid secretaries or equivalent) collect the sealed and completed Easter Offering collection envelopes (with cash/cheque donations enclosed) received from their congregation.

### Sending in donations

1. The donations (cheques/cash) and Gift Aid envelopes should be sent to the circuit MWiB treasurer, who will then bank the donations using the 'O2' paying-in book and send envelopes to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House, with a covering letter stating the donations banked, circuit name, circuit ID number and the date they were banked.
2. If churches cannot get in touch with their circuit MWiB treasurer, they can send donations and envelopes directly to the Finance Department at Methodist Church House.

**Note:** If you choose to follow this option, churches cannot claim Gift Aid as they have not banked donations into their own accounts.

In both cases, any cheques should be made payable to 'Methodist Church World Mission Fund' and not 'MWiB' and **should not** be sent to Methodist Women in Britain.

For more information about claiming Gift Aid, Gift Aid rules, and frequently asked questions on Gift Aid, please contact your church Gift Aid secretary.

**Please do not** send the Finance Office cash donations by post. Deposit cash into your church account and send in a cheque or transfer by BACS for the same amount payable to the 'World Mission Fund'.

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The **Methodist** Church