

One Great Hour of Sharing 2017 Worship Resources

Just as you
did it to one of
the least of these...
you did it to me.
—Matthew 25:40



Church of the Brethren

January 2017

Dear Pastor or Steward Leader:

Welcome to the worship resource booklet for this year's One Great Hour of Sharing. This is an order of service that may be used in part or in full to promote the offering in your congregation. It includes:

- Theme interpretation to aid your preparation
- Call to worship
- Opening prayer
- Prayer of confession and words of assurance
- Children's sermon
- Invitation to the offering
- Prayer of dedication
- Dramatic interpretation of Matthew 25:35-40
- Sermon starter with lines for preparation or delivery notes
- Service of communion
- Benediction and sending

Additional worship resources, children's activity pages, and activities for children, youth, and intergenerational groups may be found at www.brethren.org/oghs.

If you have questions or would like to update your church's standing order, feel free to contact me directly at mdeball@brethren.org or 847-429-4378.

Thank you for showing God's love to the least of these and for encouraging your congregation to give to One Great Hour of Sharing!

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt DeBall". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Matt DeBall
Coordinator of Donor Communications

Theme interpretation: You are here

“Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Paul’s letters remind us that as members of the church, we are so closely connected that we may consider ourselves as parts of one body. The New Testament constantly refers to followers of Jesus, not as Christians, but as a family—brothers and sisters.

Many churches live this out when someone is ill, mourning, or facing difficulty. We show up. We are present with loved ones who are in need. We show love in tangible ways with casseroles and cards, and with hugs and spoken words of prayer. These acts let our brothers and sisters in Christ know that we are present with them. They know they are not alone because we are beside them.

Maybe you have been through diagnosis and treatment, or unimaginable sorrow, and your church—your family—has been there to let you know that you are not forgotten in times of trouble. When someone is with you through difficult times, all their truest words and most loving actions simply declare: “I am here.”

The Bible tells us that God is like us in this way. When one of God’s beloved children suffers, God declares, “I am here.” God hears the cries of the poor and oppressed (Exodus 3:9, Psalm 10:17, 69:33), is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18), and is near to all who call out to God (Psalm 145:18). The promise that God will be with us is a constant refrain from Genesis to Revelation.

When we see the latest tragedy on the news, we might ask, “Where are you, God?” But we already know the answer—God is present in the midst of those who are hurting.

When Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-40), he reveals a mystery to us. God is most tangibly present in the world where people hunger, thirst, lack adequate clothing or shelter, and are sick or imprisoned. Christ claims as family members people who suffer and says Christ is so present in them that when you feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger—you feed, care for, and welcome Christ.

Not just your fellow Christians, but anyone in need, anywhere in the world—these are your sisters, your brothers, your children. Their needs might seem different than the person you worship with on Sunday, but your tangible gifts declare the same message: “I am here.” By reaching out to those who suffer from natural disasters, war, or systemic poverty, you let them know that they are not forgotten. Even when the need seems far away, by acting together as the body of Christ, we are able to be present for these members of Christ’s family.

You show love with gifts of food. You are present by providing seeds and training for sustainable agriculture. Through medical kits, school supplies, temporary shelters, and safe housing, you show up.

In the midst of suffering, where is God? God is here. Where are you? When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you are here.

Scriptures

— Matthew 25:31-46

— Psalm 145:18

— 1 John 3:11-24

Note: Resource titles followed by an asterisk () are available as worship slides and print-friendly versions at www.brethren.org/oghs*

Call to worship*

(To be read by two groups - like the left and right of the congregation)

All: Praise the Lord!

Group One: We praise you, God of love, and we bless your name forever and ever.

Group Two: Every day we will bless you, and praise your name.

One: Great are you, Lord, and worthy to be praised

Two: Your greatness is unsearchable

One: You are near to all who call on you

Two: To all who call on you in truth

All: Praise the Lord!

Opening Prayer

Sustaining God,

We gather to seek your presence.

We know that when we call out to you, you are near.

You hold us up when we are falling.

You are just in all your ways,
and kind in all your actions.

You have never failed us yet.

Saving God, we gather to proclaim your power,
knowing that your words are faithful and your deeds are gracious.

We stand in awe of your wondrous works.

Still-speaking God, we gather to listen for your voice.

Speak to us in scripture, song, and silence.

Show us the way to love, not just in word and speech,
but in truth and action.

Show us how to live for you and others.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Hymns and songs of praise

Prayer of confession (unison)*

God of love,

You created us to love you and one another.

We confess that we have sometimes limited that love to words,
and failed to reveal your love by our actions.

We have failed to recognize Christ in the hungry, the thirsty,
the homeless, the naked, the sick, and the incarcerated.

Too often, we have turned away from you,
failing to share with our sisters and brothers who are in need.

Forgive us. Turn our hearts, and guide us to follow you anew.

Words of assurance*

One: The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and
abounding in steadfast love.

**All: The Lord is good to all, and has compassion
for all creation.**

Litany*

One: O God of promises,
you remind us again and again
that you are present with your people.
When our hearts are broken,

All: You are here.

One: When we wait in worry to hear about a diagnosis,

All: You are here.

One: When we lose the ones we love,

All: You are here.

One: Where anyone is hungry or thirsty,

All: You are here.

One: When we feel like strangers,

All: You are here.

One: Where anyone is sick or in need of care and company,

All: You are here.

One: When people are in prison,

All: You are here.

One: When anyone needs clothing,

All: You are here.

One: Loving God,

You are here with us when we suffer.

Empower us to be with others as they suffer, our neighbors both near and far. You are here, God, in the midst of suffering—and we want to be where you are.

All: Amen.

Theme interpretation skit: “You are here” (optional)

Children’s sermon

Theme text: Matthew 25: 35-40

Can you remember a time when you had a stomach ache? Perhaps it hurt so terribly that you wanted to curl into a ball and cry your pain away. Maybe you felt better when someone brought you your favorite teddy bear or doll so you could hug it tightly. Or maybe your best buddy—a pet dog or cat—licked your face or cuddled next to you. Perhaps a loved one brought you some medicine or a cup of warm soup in your favorite bowl. Such kind gestures surely helped you feel better.

Let us imagine together:

(You may consider acting out this story as a skit to make it more engaging.)

There was once a little girl, who had a bad tummy ache.

As she lay sick in bed, her grandmother came to check on her.

Grandma peeped into the girl’s room, kissed her on the forehead, and covered her with a colorful, homemade quilt.

Then she whispered: “Your grandma is here.”

The little girl mustered enough strength to crawl into her grandma's lap so they could rock together in an old, rickety rocking chair. The little girl drifted off to sleep as she listened to her grandma hum softly. Every note hummed was a drop of medicine that echoed with melodies of love. The next morning, the little girl's tummy still hurt a little—but she felt better because her grandma had been there. She felt special, comforted, and cared for. The young girl knew she was not alone.

There are many people all around the world aching and in pain. They are crying because they really need help. Some are crying because their tummies hurt from hunger or thirst. Others are crying because they feel all alone. Our scripture today teaches us how to respond to the aches and pains of people around the world when they cry out for help, just as our loved ones respond to our cries when we are sick. We may not know who they are, but they are our brothers and sisters in Christ and we should treat them with the same gentle and loving care as the grandma in our story. After all, we are all members of God's family. When a member of our family hurts, we feel their pain and sadness, too.

We can help people feel loved, welcomed, and special by being kind and helping whenever we can, like we do through One Great Hour of Sharing. This offering provides assistance to families needing food and shelter. Can you remember how nice it felt to be snuggled up in a warm blanket when you were sick or to have a warm cup of soup when your tummy hurt? The Bible story teaches us that every act of kindness we demonstrate toward others can be felt by God, too. Every time grandma gives you a famous bear hug to help you feel better, God is giving and receiving a hug, too! That's amazing! When someone is hungry and you share your meal, you also share a meal with God. You not only show them that "you are here," but you also help them know "God is here!"

We may not always be able to respond to every cry in the world, but we can do our best to be friendly, welcome old and new friends, and love our sisters and brothers near and far by sharing what we can. One Great Hour of Sharing helps us do this.

Let's pray together:

Dear God, when there are cries for help, please help us to care and share. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dramatic reading of Matthew 25:35-40*

**All: For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in,**

One: Can we hear with the ears of Justice? Hear the clattering sounds beneath the pots and pans in kitchens where more than hot meals are stewing for the greedy? For those who prepare the feast are the victims of greed and extortion, themselves hungry and starving for restitution from overstuffed bellies who refuse to share their crumbs.

All: I needed clothes and you clothed me,

One: Can we be moved by justice to clothe the factory worker with fair wages as she mends garments for large businesses that profit from her toil?

**All: I was sick, and you looked after me. I was in prison,
and you came to visit me.**

One: Can we escape the stench of injustice? The smell of forced labor, debt bondage, and slavery-like practices must fill our nostrils just as it chokes the life out of children, women, and men who are deprived of liberty, freedom and independence.

**All: “Then the righteous will answer [the Lord],
‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you something to drink?
When did we see you a stranger and invite you in,
or needing clothes and clothe you?
When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’”**

One: Where is Love in justice? In the courage of those who use their freedom to fight for the liberation of those who are oppressed. In the truth-telling of those who use their pens to author policy and legislation, creating tough consequences for those who commit crimes against humanity.

**All: The Lord “will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one
of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”**

One: We are the sum of justice. We are here to be the light of God in the world. We are here to use our voices to expose systems of oppression and suffering. We are to use our collective strength

to be bands of love and witnesses for peace, kindness, and good. We must use our wisdom, knowledge, resources, and privilege to advocate for all—no matter gender, race, orientation, or affluence.

All: The Lord “will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” Let us gather together so that our bodies, minds, and spirits will speak! Let the power of our voices be a wellspring for love so that the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the imprisoned remembered, and the homeless welcomed. Let the pounding of our feet dismantle oppression, and create a spirited rumbling for justice in the land.

One: Let us find justice within ourselves. For this is the prophetic Word and Wisdom of God.

All: God is here and comforts the poor, the oppressed, and the broken-hearted. We are here in the midst of the crisis, disaster, and suffering. We are here—present, prayerful, and purposeful amidst God’s people. We are here because, with God’s help, we are the ones we have been waiting for. Amen.

Sermon starter

People who are helped by One Great Hour of Sharing comment, “*you were here* when we needed help.” The offering allows the church to show up and be present with people who are in need. Since One Great Hour of Sharing works with local congregations and organizations with roots in affected communities, we can be present quickly—and stay for the long-term. This means that after the news has moved on, you are *still* present, helping people rebuild their lives.

This is wonderful from the perspective of material aid, but what does it have to do with our faith? The theme for this year’s offering, “you are here,” provides multiple possible avenues to explore the connection between human need, our faith, and One Great Hour of Sharing in your sermon.

1) “You are here” could be the response to a question provoked by tragedy and suffering: “Where are you, God?” Psalm 145:18 echoes the refrain throughout scripture that God is nearby, present with God’s people. As soon as a person calls on God, God is here.

When have you felt God’s presence in a time of deep need?

2) Through the lens of Matthew’s parable, “you are here” answers the question: “Where do we find Christ in the world?” He is *here*, in those who hunger and thirst.

The parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) begins with something of a mixed metaphor—the Son of Man is seated as king on a throne, but acting as a shepherd—separating sheep from goats. This shepherd king divides people based on their response to basic human needs. Both groups are taken by surprise, and ask “when was it, Lord...?”

The needs are much more than metaphor. They so basic that we can easily imagine them 2,000 years later—food, water, clothing, hospitality, care when sick, and visits when in prison. We can easily relate to these needs because they are our needs, too. We don’t need to look outside our congregations or communities, or even our own lives to find examples.

At the core of this passage is the claim that Christ is present in the human needs of the world, so that feeding the hungry is feeding Christ himself. This is an even more dramatic claim than the idea that Christians can show Christ’s love through our deeds of kindness and work for justice. Rather, Christ completely identifies with “the least of these who are members of my family.” When someone is thirsty, Christ is thirsty. When we see a situation of need—*Christ is here*.

The images of the throne, the king, and the kingdom may be harder to grasp, but in this context, it shows us the kind of glory that is worthy of God’s kingdom. The glory of God is shown when hungry people are fed, strangers are welcomed—wherever human need is met.

How has your congregation fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, or reached out to the “least of these” in your community? When have you encountered the face of Christ in people in need?

3) “You are here” shows the church uniting to respond to those in need—when you, along with many others, give, it means that the church can be *here* in the midst of need, even when it is far away. Together, we are able to respond quickly and be *here to stay* when the needs are long-term. Pooling resources allows our reach to extend much farther into the world than any one person or congregation, to be there sooner and stay for the long haul.

Have you or someone you know been to countries where the Church of the Brethren has partners (Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, India, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Spain)? Could a personal story show how we can be present with people who are far away through our giving?

Invitation to the offering

We worship a God who gives, generously and abundantly. God gives all creatures their food in due season, and from God's open hand the desire of every living thing is satisfied. God has given us so many blessings.

The food we eat, the friends and family we cherish, the precious gift of God's love for us, a love that led Jesus to lay down his life for us.

When that love abides in us, we cannot refuse to help our brothers and sisters in need. Through our regular offerings we... *(share something exciting from the work of your congregation).*

Through this special offering for One Great Hour of Sharing, we join with other congregations in the Church of the Brethren to make our presence known to people who feel forgotten—the hungry, the hurting, the thirsty, the sick. Our gifts, together, share the love of God all over the world.

Prayer of dedication

Gracious God,
In this offering we return to you a portion of the blessings you have showered upon us. Bless these gifts, that they might bring comfort, food, and shelter to those who need it. Bless those who receive these gifts. Let them know your love through full bellies, warm clothing, and safe places to sleep. Amen.

Service of communion

Invitation

“We know love by this, that Christ laid down his life for us.”

We come to this table to celebrate, share, and experience that life-giving love.

There is a Latin American table grace that says,
“Bless, O Lord, our bread. Give bread to those who are hungry.
And to those who have bread, give hunger for justice.
Bless, O Lord, our bread.” (*Hymnal Supplement #1069*)

We come to this table to break bread together,
joining with the church around the world and throughout
the ages at this foretaste of the great feast to come.
Some come to this table hungry, struggling to find
the bread they need for each day. Some come to this table
with access to plenty of food, but starving for God’s nourishing love.

What we see in this feast of love, a table where all are fed,
can also make us hungry for the world beyond this table.
This bread and cup can sustain us and give us strength to
lay down our lives for one another.

At this table, we remember the night Jesus was betrayed:

“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread,
and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples,
and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup,
and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying,
‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant,
which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.
I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine
until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’”
(*Matthew 26:26-29*)

Blessing the elements

Bless, O Lord, this bread, and us as we receive it
that we might be the body of Christ, united in love and service.
Bless, O Lord, the cup poured out to draw us in.
Let it renew in us your covenant of love,
and our shared commitment to you. Amen.

Distribute and partake of the bread and cup

Prayer of thanksgiving

We thank you, gracious God, for your gifts of bread and wine,
the gifts of Christ's body and blood.

We thank you for nourishing us, sustaining us,
and empowering us to live as one body.

We thank you for your most amazing love,
and pray that your love would abide in us now and always.

In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Closing hymn

Benediction and sending

We worship God in sanctuaries, in beautiful, holy spaces.
But Christ has called us to find him in this world by searching
for the least of his brothers and sisters—those who are
hungry, thirsty, sick, in prison, naked, and estranged.
May we go forth into this community
with eyes open to see Christ in our world,
and may we know God's love by loving one another.

May we love, not just in word and speech,
but in truth and action.

OR

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours;
no hands but yours; no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which the compassion
of Christ must look out on the world.
Yours are the feet with which
He is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which
He is to bless His people.”

(“Christ Has No Body” by Teresa of Avila)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

One Great HOUR OF SHARING

*Cover photo by Jeffrey Abyei
Liturgy by Laura Jean Torgerson
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*Learn more about
One Great Hour of Sharing
at www.brethren.org/oghs.*



Church of the Brethren

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