

LOVE IS _____.



Idea Pack



What is Love is _____.

We hope that you find these resources helpful and that they will inspire, stir your imagination and help you to clarify what it is in your context that you want to share about the love of God with the communities that you serve and seek to engage with. We are convinced that speaking of love, acting in love and becoming more loving is our principal task as Christian people.

A confident Christian witness emerges from us being clear as Christian disciples and as a Church about the love of God, which can be shared generously with others. If we are confident in loving ourselves, our neighbours and our communities then much else will follow.

Notes for Leaders

Love Is_____ is an open invitation, so are these resources - feel free to use the parts that are helpful to you, and leave the rest where it is. Feel free to adapt, to tweak, to edit, to use in church, outside, online or wherever you find yourself.

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LOVE IS _____.



LOVE IS= Prayer walking

Struggling to think of where to begin for LOVE IS? Why not start by prayer walking?

Prayer walking is as simple as it sounds - praying as you walk. When we prayer walk we are stepping into our authority as God's children to bless people and places in Jesus' name. This simple task is a great way to bring transformation to your local community by asking God to break in.

Start and end together- Agree a place and time to start prayer walking and talking to God together. Begin by explaining why you've gathered to pray, and share specific prayer points, if relevant. If splitting into smaller groups, then agree a place and time to end together. Try going in pairs Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs. It's not as intimidating as a large group, and is safer than people going on their own.

If you have a larger group, breaking into pairs can help you to pray for different parts of your area.

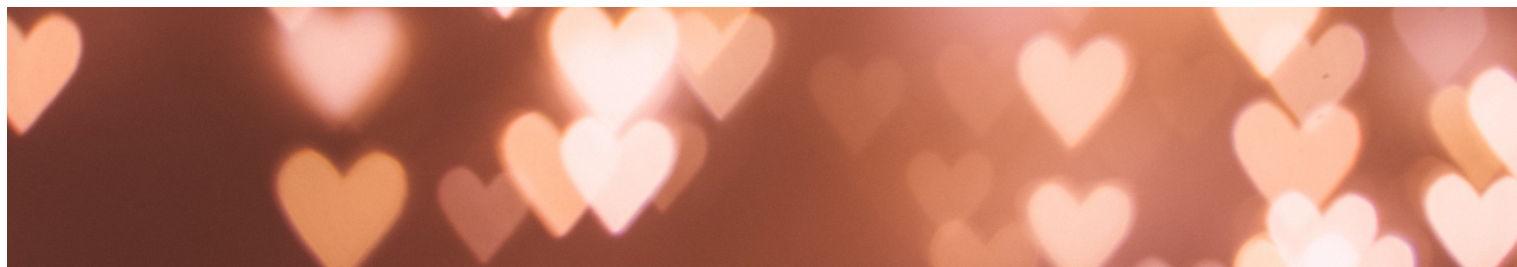
Choose Whether or not to plan your route
You can plan ahead to ensure that you pray for specific places, or simply ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time - just make sure you don't get lost!

Use your natural and supernatural senses As you prayer walk, be aware of your surroundings: what you see, smell, hear and touch. But also be aware of what God is saying to you as you move around your community; if any Bible verses pop into your head or if you have any pictures, visions or words of knowledge. Turn these natural and supernatural senses into prayer.

Unable to prayer walk?

If you have internet access why not use google maps and use the browse street view function and virtually walk through your local area?

LOVE IS _____.



LOVE IS= Having a conversation

Why not intentionally have a conversation with a friend whether in person or over the phone/online?

Thirty-six per cent of practising Christians say having a conversation with a Christian was a key influence in their coming to faith. Jesus shows us the healing, transformational power of conversation in the Gospels. This is encouraging; you don't need special techniques – just a conversation that flows naturally from who you are and who you're talking to. Here are some ways to integrate faith into conversations:

- 1) Notice what God is doing in your life and when somebody asks "How was your weekend?"
- 2) Ask a question such as- What do you think LOVE IS?

LOVE IS= Sharing your story

The best starting point in sharing God's Love is our testimony – our story about being part of God's story, our own lived experience of God's love and grace. This will be much more powerful than any theological argument. Our testimony isn't a finished story; it's an ongoing story of our belonging, questioning and living with God. Testimony takes honesty, courage and vulnerability.

Here are some ideas for putting it into action:

- 1) Record a video of you telling your story of faith and share it on social media or your church website.
- 2) Write out your story and share it on your own social media

LOVE IS _____.



LOVE IS= Going Online

There is no doubt that we are online and on our phones more than we have ever been. The pandemic showed us that we could share God's Love online.

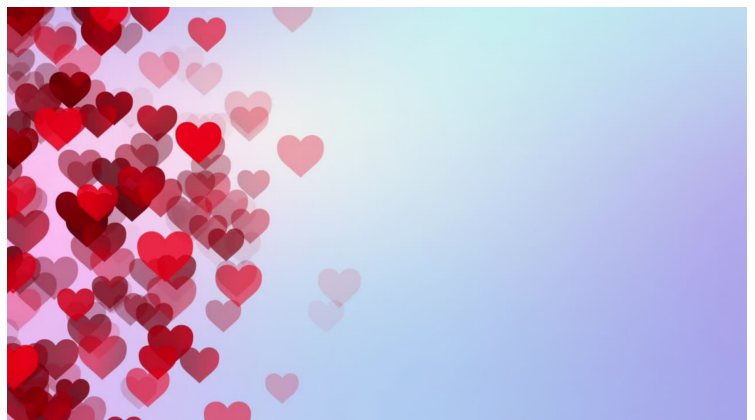
Why not try some of these ideas:

1. Download one of the LOVE IS_ templates from the District website and use that on your on church or personal social media page
2. Look for opportunities to support others and share God's love, such as by saying "I'll be praying for you."
3. Host an online LOVE IS_ prayer zoom gathering



4. Host a virtual LOVE IS_ quiz night. Who remembers the virtual quizzes during lockdown? Well why not bring them back for one night only during the LOVE IS_ period.

5. Use the share button and share your online services during LOVE IS_



LOVE IS _____.

LOVE IS= Fundraising

Your gift to All We Can will help to make a dramatic difference today.

All We Can's work with people around the world, expressing God's love for our global neighbours to help see people's potential fulfilled.

1. A regular gift of just £6 a month could help to support two farmers with all they need to develop a sustainable source of income through farming.
allwecan.org.uk/steps

2. If your church would like to find out more about All We Can's work and stay connected with a community around the world - you could become a Partner Church at **allwecan.org.uk/partner**

3. Would you like to #HoldTogether with us? Every Wednesday and Friday, All We Can is live on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter in a time of community and connection. Search **@allwecanuk** on social media to join us at 1:17pm.

4. Or perhaps you could hold a fundraising event in your church, run a marathon (or a lot less!), or invite an All We Can speaker to visit your church to share more about how God's love is at work around the world.
Visit **allwecan.org.uk/get-involved**



LOVE IS _____.

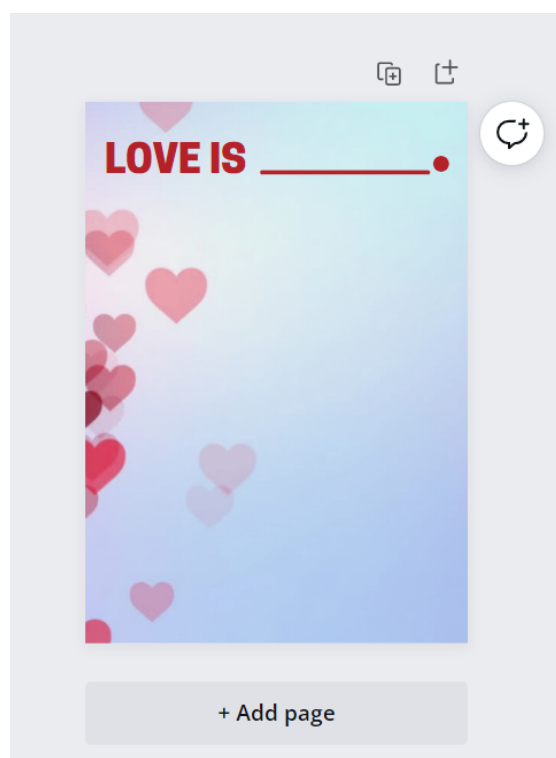
LOVE IS= community

Sometimes loving your community is not just telling them its showing.

1. Why not organise a community litter pick? Often local councils are able to provide the tools needed to help.
2. LOVE IS_. takes place during Easter. Why not consider what you could give away during this period to your local community?



3. Go to the Northampton Methodist District website and download the LOVE IS_. poster. Use these around your building so that local groups such as parenting classes, Alcoholics Anonymous, domestic abuse helplines, or bereavement support groups. Whether they're run by the church, in the church or elsewhere, signposting to these is about church being a place where you care about one another and seek healing and transformation for people.



LOVE IS _____.



LOVE IS= Easter

Easter, one of the most important days of the Christian calendar, offers an opportunity to tell the most important story of LOVE ever.

Heres some Easter inspired ideas for you to consider:

- 1) Give out Easter Eggs? Though Easter Eggs originated from a pre-pagan festival, these eggs have become commonly associated with Easter. One way of sharing eggs is by buying from meaningfulchocolate.co.uk. See how these Eggs can demonstrate what LOVE is in your community.
- 2) Give a symbol at Easter? Maybe you don't want to give out Easter Eggs. Why not consider what symbol symbolises the Easter story to you. A small wooden cross or hot cross buns could well be the answer. Whatever it is make it personal and see what joy abounds.

LOVE IS= Having a go

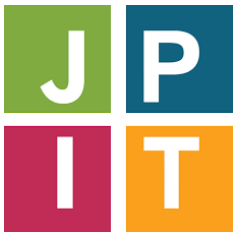
LOVE is_. is about having a go and doing something. So whether you use one of the ideas from this pack. Or develop your own ideas, our hope is that through this initiative you will be able to share God's Love.

Lastly, we would love to hear how LOVE Is_. has gone for you. Why not share your stories with us on social media via our facebook page. Or email them to matt.forsyth@northamptonmethodistdistrict.org.uk

Have Fun!

LOVE IS _____.

LOVE IS _____.



The **Methodist** Church 
Northampton District





What is Love is _____.

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A confident Christian witness emerges from us being clear as Christian disciples and as a Church about the love of God, which can be shared generously with others. If we are confident in loving ourselves, our neighbours and our communities then much else will follow. Those who stop coming to Church, or those who never have been, or those critical of the Christian Church do not understand why Christian people speak of love so freely and so often struggle to act lovingly. We need not just to worship the God of love, but become signs of that love in the world.

Notes for Leaders

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A Draft Order of Service

- Call to Worship
- Opening Hymn / Song
- Opening Prayers - see below
- Hymn / Song
- Interactive Activity
- Hymn / Song
- Bible readings:
- Sermon / Reflection
- Hymn / Song
- Prayers of intercession
- Closing Hymn / Song
- Blessing and Sending Out

LOVE IS _____.

Call to Worship

Here we are to worship,
Here we are to meet with you, Lord God,
Here we are to learn of your love,
And to seek to love each other more.

Here we are, we have come,
Come amongst us by your Spirit,
Lord God.
Amen.

Opening Prayers

Option 1

Let us pray.

Gracious God, your love has called us here,
and we come, to worship.

God of all time and space, you are here
with us in this time and in this moment, and
for that we are truly thankful.

God of this Sunday, we come to give you
our praise, for you are all around, within
and about us.

God of love, may we open our hearts to
receive your love today.

God of love, may we learn to be people of
love today, sharing hope and grace with all
we encounter.

God who loved the world so much, that
your only son came amongst us, living as
we live, we take a moment to say sorry for
all the ways we have failed you, all the
times we have fallen short of your glory.

In the stillness, we say sorry.

[Pause].

And we give thanks that you have already
forgiven us, by your love.

God of love, we come. Come, by your
Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayers

Option 2

Let us be still for a moment.

In the stillness, listen for the still small voice of
God.

To prepare yourself, try to picture what you
think of when you hear the sentence 'love is ____
' . What are you thinking of? What do you think
love is? Hold that in your head in the stillness.

*Hold a period of quiet, perhaps playing some gentle
music on a keyboard, or you could music from
Taize or similar.*

Gracious God, you are amongst us, and we open
our hearts up to hear you at work.

We say sorry for all that we have not done, and
all the ways we have fallen short of your glory.
We say thank you for all the amazing things you
have done for us.

We praise you because you are an awesome
God.

And we prepare ourselves to meet you again in
worship.

In the stillness, offer a word to God today.

Perhaps one word that summarises how you
feel, what you are worried about, what you are
thankful for, or what you are hoping. In the
quiet, just choose a word and repeat it, under
your breath or in your head.

This is your prayer.

Hold another stillness.

Thank you Lord, for you have heard all our
prayers, spoken and wordless.

God of love, we come. Come, by your Spirit.
Amen.

LOVE IS _____.



Interactive activity

Option 1

Using the video **available at**, you and the whole church community could make origami hearts. You could do this as part of the service, or make lots of them in advance (perhaps at the junior church in the previous weeks) and then decorate these with some of the words that you associate with love.

You could then use this moment in the service to commit to giving this heart to someone, or offering to take them in to display somewhere in your community (dentist surgery, local post office, for example) where they can give them away.

End the activity with this prayer:

God of love, take the love that is in our hearts, and help us to share it with those around us, in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Option 2

If you have space in your church building to do this (and current restrictions allow it), invite everyone to stand against one wall of the church building and then read from the list below, one at a time (or make up your own) and for each item on the list, mark one end of the wall as 'I love ___ a lot' and the other as 'I don't love ___ at all'. As you read each item out, invite people to stand at the appropriate point on the wall to display their love for that particular thing.

- Pizza
- Marmite
- Summer holidays
- Singing hymns
- Justice
- God

End the activity with this prayer:

God of love, our hearts are full of love. Help us to learn to love you more and to share that love with those around us, in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.



Bible readings

Psalms 143: 7-10

Luke 15:8-10



Sermon / reflection

Option 1 - Helen Cameron's Reflection

I watch very little television but do enjoy watching old black and white films (including *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Scrooge*, *Casablanca*, *The Philadelphia Story*...) and old musicals (more often in colour (*Meet me in St Louis*, *My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story*). Hidden away in the musical film of the play *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, "My Fair Lady" is a fascinating little commentary about the nature of love. Eliza Dolittle (played brilliantly by Audrey Hepburn) responds to a declaration of love from a suitor Freddie, with a scathing retort. She sings, "Words, words, words, I'm so sick of words, don't speak of love - show me". Moving from films to novels we come across a character in an EM Forster novel, *A Passage to India*, who hearing words echoing around a cavernous cave is moved to speak of "poor talkative Christianity". She is being disparaging and has clearly moved away from the faith she had previously espoused - we suspect as a result of detecting hypocrisy in those who speak of love, but don't or can't show it to anyone.

Such a big gap between words and actions of individuals and organisations is obvious and leads to an erosion of trust and credibility in Christian people, Christian leaders and in the Church itself. Being less talkative and clearer in our actions, intentions and commitments within our communities may lead to a renewed credibility, a more confident witness and certainly a reduction in hypocrisy. A good friend and colleague of mine, the late Professor John Hull often summed up the gap between the stated intention of the Church and the actual reality as, "the Church's besetting sin is to worship Jesus and to fail to follow where he actually leads".

LOVE IS _____.

Helen Cameron's Reflection (continued)

Jesus, as we encounter him in the gospels, is someone who teaches and preaches and is someone who each day lives out his call to radical love which includes all, especially those pushed to the margins by others. The friends of Jesus, those he eats with and spends time with and receives ministry from are, more often than not, the least respectable and those with lower status such as children, women, the sick, the ill, and the poor. When Jesus's enemies want to denigrate him they call him, a "wine bibber". In Luke's gospel we read, "the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" Luke 7: 34

So, our discipleship of Christ must be grounded in prayer and worship, in praise of God's love and God's justice, and it must usher in the Kingdom of God's grace where all are welcome, all are included and all are saved to the uttermost. Christian discipleship must include honest engagement with one another, with our communities, including those who may be very different from us in various ways, God calls us to wake up and learn how to love and respect one another.

I want to say with theologian and priest, Carter Heyward that love is a choice — not simply, or necessarily, a rational choice, but rather a willingness to be present to others without pretence or guile or agenda. "Love is a conversion to humanity — a willingness to participate with others in the healing of a broken world and broken lives. Love is the choice to experience life as a member of the human family, a partner in the dance of life."

Love is practical and concrete. Love is not fundamentally a sweet feeling; not, at heart, a matter of sentiment, attachment, or being "drawn toward." Love is active, effective, a matter of making reciprocal and mutually beneficial relation with one's friends and enemies, whoever is our neighbour in our communities.

Showing such radical and inclusive love as disciples and as a Church may be costly and demanding and may make us feel uncomfortable. That leads me to reflect on the parable that Jesus told about the Good Samaritan. After telling this story — a vivid account of how different kinds of people cared for the man injured and set upon in a mugging it seems that it is not the recognisably holy people who show care for the victim but someone regarded with suspicion and fear by many of Jesus' contemporaries.

The Church has, at times only been willing to become involved in people's lives in exchange for certain conduct, in exchange for conformity, control and compliance. That way of working simply will not do.). I suggest that the cross invites a different process: it is when we are taken to the edge, when we are least safe, when we are in the company of those who are least like us, when we are 'de-centred' that is when we come to know most clearly who God is and who we are as the people of God.

Finally, the cross stands as the symbol of what the 'powers that be' do to God's peaceable kingdom in the name of security and religion. To be where Jesus is in his cross is to suffer and resist the powers that be and their vision for the world. When I am lifted up, says Jesus, I will draw all people to myself. To be where Jesus is on his cross is necessarily to have a universal horizon — of love for each and for all, a love that transforms and liberates and lets the oppressed go free. So don't just talk of love- share it freely.

LOVE IS _____.

Option 2 - All We Can's Reflection

- We have so much to be thankful for... what are you thankful for today?

- In our culture, and with our relatively wealthy, Western culture, we take a great deal for granted, don't we?

- Our Love Is service is being brought to you in partnership with our friends at All We Can, the Methodist relief and development agency. The communities they are working with, people don't have access to many of the things we take for granted. For example, in Nkayi in Zimbabwe, people live as subsistence farmers, providing for their families simply from the few crops they can grow. Shupaki lives in a little homestead made up of mud huts that she and her husband built themselves and she must grow what she can on the land to feed her children and keep them going through school. Sadly, when her husband died recently, and with the impact of climate change on the harvest, and the Covid-lockdowns on her ability to sell her produce, the next steps for Shupaki are not easy.

- She can't afford to take anything for granted, but with the support of All We Can's amazing local partner, HEFO (the Health, Education and Food Organisation), Shupaki and her family are taking the next steps towards being more financially secure and having a more sustainable way of life. Will you walk with them as they take their next steps?

Find out more, watch a film and make your regular gift at allwecan.org.uk/nextsteps

[You might also wish to download and play The Next Steps short film at this point in the service].

- During this last 18 months, we've all realised how much we were taking for granted - going for a meal with family, sharing food, going to school, even getting petrol!

- As we learn this lesson again, let's make sure we don't take what we have for granted, and we look for opportunities to share what we have with those most in need. We can do that through All We Can and the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), but we can also do that in our own communities and with those around us.

Crucially, we also have to learn again the amazing lesson that God's love for us never ends, and we are accepted just as we are. As the theologian Paul Tillich puts it: all you have to do is 'Simply accept that you are accepted, you are accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know'.

- As we reach that level of acceptance, may we never take God's love for granted. May we be grateful every single day, every single moment, and may our gratitude shape how we live and breathe and have our being.

- As another theologian, Mister Eckhart said, 'If the only prayer you ever say is "thank you", that will be enough.' Not because our lives end with thank you, but because in the act of thanking, we are changed into more grateful, more loving people. That's why we teach our children manners, that's why it's helpful to keep a 'gratitude journal', that's why we give thanks for God's love for us.

- As you leave this service, and return to the places where you are known, the places where you work, you live, you are in community, may you know God's love for you is unconditional and pure, and may you show God's love to all who you meet. And may the God who is love go with you.

LOVE IS _____.



Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

God of love, we bring you ourselves.

We bring you our lives, as they currently are, with all that is broken and wrong, but also much to be grateful for and to celebrate.

Use us, O God, to build your kingdom, to seek peace in our world, to build communities of love.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we bring you our churches,

Caught in this strange 'in between' time, as we reflect on the painful experiences of lockdown, and how we can best serve our communities and our world over this summer and into the year ahead.

Show us how to create safe spaces, spaces where people can grieve, can find healing, where people can find life, can meet with you and be transformed by your love.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we bring you our nation,

We bring to you all who have been working overtime to see us through this time of crisis, and all who will need to work overtime as we seek to rebuild our communities, our economy, our relationships and our livelihoods.

We bring you our leaders and all who must face difficult decisions or face up to inadequacies in our systems exposed by the process of lockdown and pandemic.

Show us how to be a people of grace.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we pray for our world.

As we look out on a global pandemic, and a world in which we have gone backwards in tackling poverty and reaching those most in need during this time of pandemic, which has affected the most vulnerable in our world, and changed our way of life here in the UK, perhaps forever.

As we rebuild, show us how to build a world in which every person's needs are provided for. A world where every person can know your love.

May we follow in your way, O God.

May I follow in your way, O God.

Show me what is mine to do.

We bring this, and all our prayers, in Jesus' name,

Amen.[1]

Prayers from The Vine at Home, by Twelvebaskets.

Find out more at theworshipcloud.com



Blessing and sending out

Go from this place, with love in your hearts.

Rise from this moment, with a desire to share love in your communities.

Go forward from this service, and may the God who is love go with you.

LOVE IS _____.

Hymn /song suggestions

STF 61 - Our God is a great big God
STF 105 - God said world
STF 286 - What kind of love is this
STF 296 - Christ has risen while earth
slumbers
STF 309 - See what a morning, gloriously
bright
STF 409 - Let us build a house where love
can dwell
STF 503 - Love divine, all loves excelling
STF 610 - Best of all is God is with us
STF 611 - Brother, sister let me serve you
STF 615 - Let love be real
STF 676 - Christ from whom all blessings
flow
STF 687 - One human family God has made
STF 693 - Beauty for brokenness

Unending love - Hillsong Worship
Glorious Day - Casting Crowns
Your love never fails - Jesus Culture
Oceans (where feet may fail) - Hillsong
United



Other ideas

Why not look at the LOVE IS_ idea pack
that is downloadable from our LOVE IS_
page.



LOVE IS _____.