

Preparing the way

An Advent service to launch *livesimply*

Welcome

Leader: Today, in this joyful Advent season, a season of expectation, when we prepare to greet the infant king, we meet together to launch the *livesimply* project. We begin our *livesimply* journey inspired by those who have gone before us, in the company of those who stand beside us and for the sake of those yet born.

As we set out on our journey, let us recall the physical and spiritual journey of God's people in the Old Testament, which reaches its climax when Jesus, the longed-for Messiah, is born. As we follow their journey, let us look where we are on our own journeys of faith and take stock. Are we listening to God? Do we love our neighbour and are we good news to the poor?

Forty years after the publication of Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, the *livesimply* project calls us to re-examine our lifestyles, both individually and as a community, and to choose to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor. So let us journey on with fresh insight and renewed commitment, encouraged by those who have gone before us and inspired by the vision of a world in which human dignity is respected and everyone can reach their full potential.

In the faithful love of our God, the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:78-79)

Opening hymn

Invitation to prayer

Leader: Lord, teach us your paths

All: That we may know your ways
walk in your truth
and be ready to greet you
as your light dawns. Amen.

Reader: Vulnerable God, as we await your coming with eager expectation, may we search your ways and prepare your welcome. Touch us with your truth and speak to our longing.

All: Let darkness recede and your light beckon.



Simon Rawles

Reader: As you journey towards us, may we turn to meet you. Open our ears to hear your voice and make our hearts ready to receive your call.

All: Let darkness recede and your light beckon.

Reader: As the dawn breaks, may your light shine. Penetrate our hidden lives and open our eyes to face those things shrouded in darkness.

All: Let darkness recede and your light beckon.

Reader: As we hear your message, may we know it afresh. Shatter our complacency and challenge us with the voice of justice.

All: Let darkness recede and your light beckon.

Reader: As we meet you in the Christ Child, may we know the worth of vulnerability. Show us the way of compassion and the path of solidarity.

All: Let darkness recede and your light beckon.

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PART ONE: GENEROSITY

Reflecting on the Word

Leader: As we light our first candle let us remember those who have journeyed before us walking in the light of faith. Inspired by their example, may we hear your call and tread your path.

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12 - 4:2

Reader: May we answer God's call

All: **And be generous in our love for one another.**

Examination of conscience

Leader: *Please pick up your stone.* God of infinite love and abundant generosity, creator of a plentiful world for all to share, when the Christ child comes, he will bring to light those things now hidden in darkness. In this light, let us look at our own lives both individually and as a community.

All: **The stones in our hands represent the stumbling blocks each of us finds within us, in our reluctance to change our lifestyles and our hesitation to live more simply.**

Leader: We now turn to the Lord in the silence of our hearts ...

(Pause for extended period of reflection)

In your abundant generosity transform our lives, that we might find your light in the darkness, create in us a desire to live simply, so that our lives may reflect your generosity.

All: **God the Creator loves us.
God the Redeemer forgives us.
God the Sustainer heals us. Amen.**

Leader: Please put down your stones, as we sing our hymn...

Hymn

PART TWO: STEWARDSHIP

Reflecting on the Word

Leader: As we light our second candle, let us remember the prophets of old who discerned the signs of the times and called people back to God. Remembering their challenge to change, may we too respond to their message of justice and peace.

Reading: Luke 3:1-6

Reader: May we answer God's call

All: **And live justly as stewards of creation.**

Examination of conscience

Leader: *Please pick up your stone.* God of infinite love and abundant generosity, creator of a plentiful world for all to share, when the Christ child comes, he will bring to light those things now hidden in darkness. In this light, let us look at our own lives both individually and as a community.

All: **The stones in our hands are the stumbling blocks we find within us, when we forget to be good stewards of your creation and fail to live sustainably on your earth.**

Leader: We now turn to the Lord in the silence of our hearts...

(Pause for extended period of reflection)

In your abundant generosity transform our lives, that we might find your light in the darkness; create in us a desire to live sustainably, so that those who follow after us may enjoy the fruits of your creation.

All: **God the Creator loves us.
God the Redeemer forgives us.
God the Sustainer heals us. Amen.**

The journey

Leader: As we set out on our *livesimply* journey, let us imagine a changed world, a world we have prepared to welcome Christ, where the hungry are filled and the lowly exalted. Let us say together the words from Isaiah that John the Baptist proclaimed. Even when the task ahead feels overwhelming, they will act as an inspiration to us.

All: **A voice cries, 'Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh.
Make a straight highway for our God across the wastelands.
Let every valley be filled in,
every mountain and hill be levelled,
every cliff become a plateau,
every escarpment a plain;
then the glory of Yahweh will be revealed
and all humanity will see it together.'**

Isaiah 40: 3-5

Leader: Please put down your stones, as we sing our hymn...

Hymn

PART THREE: JUSTICE

Reflecting on the Word

Leader: As we light our third candle, let us remember John the Baptist, witness to the truth. Guided by his energy and vigour, may we burn with the same passion to bring an end to injustice and announce the Good News.

Reading: Luke 3:10-18

Reader: May we answer God's call

All: **And share what we have with those who have nothing.**

Examination of conscience

Leader: *Please pick up your stone.* God of infinite love and abundant generosity, creator of a plentiful world for all to share, when the Christ child comes, he will bring to light those things now hidden in darkness. In this light, let us look at our own lives both individually and as a community.

All: **The stones in our hands weigh us down, for the times we have pursued wealth at the expense of the poor and failed to live in solidarity with our community, both local and global.**

Leader: We now turn to the Lord in the silence of our hearts.

(Pause for extended period of reflection)

In your abundant generosity transform our lives, that we might find your light in the darkness; grant us the capacity to change, to bring about a world that mirrors your wisdom.

All: **God the Creator loves us.
God the Redeemer forgives us.
God the Sustainer heals us. Amen.**

The journey

Reader One: When the people coming to John to be baptised ask him what they must do, he answers, "If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same." John's answer talks about responding to our neighbour's need, about sharing what we have with those who have less, so that the community of God can be built.

Reader Two: Today we have each received a stone. Stones can either be stumbling blocks or building blocks as we travel on our journey. Now in the final part of this liturgy for Advent our stones will come to symbolise renewed lives of simplicity, sustainability and solidarity.

Leader: Please put down your stones, as we sing our hymn...

Hymn

PART FOUR: COURAGE

Reflecting on the Word

Leader: As we light the fourth candle let us remember Mary, the mother of the Christ Child, who responded to God's call with courage and with joy, believing that his promise to her would be fulfilled. Rejoicing in her example, may we take courage and live simply according to God's word.

Reading: Luke 1:39-44

Reader: May we answer God's call

All: **With courage and with joy.**

Examination of conscience

Leader: *Please pick up your stones once more.* God of infinite love and abundant generosity, creator of a plentiful world for all to share, when the Christ child comes, he will bring to light those things now hidden in darkness. In this light, let us look at our own lives both individually and as a community.

All: **The stones we hold will become building blocks for the future. We reflect on and give thanks for the times when we have lived simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor.**

Leader: We now turn to the Lord in the silence of our hearts.

(Pause for extended period of reflection)

In your abundant generosity transform our lives, that we might find your light in the darkness, create in us a desire to act in solidarity, so that the pillars of injustice crumble and those now crushed are set free.

All: **God the Creator loves us.
God the Redeemer forgives us.
God the Sustainer heals us. Amen.**

The journey

Leader: All journeys have points of reference that help us to locate where we are and the direction in which we're going. This year, during our Advent journey, we have deepened our understanding of how our lifestyles contribute to injustice in the world so that we may choose to live more simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor.

Let us join hands as we promise to respond to God's call for justice and to support each other to live simply.

All: We promise to look hard at our lifestyles and to choose to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor. In this way, we can help create a world in which human dignity is respected and everyone can reach their full potential.

Leader: To mark this point, I invite you to think of your stone as a building block to living simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor. We will now use our stones to create a cairn to remind us of the new world we are helping to build together. I invite you now to bring your stones forward and help create a cairn here. As you lay it on the pile, think of a way in which you can live more simply.

(All place their stone on the pile)

Leader: Together, let us pray the *livesimply* prayer:

All: Compassionate and loving God,
you created the world for us all to share,
a world of beauty and plenty.
Create in us a desire to live simply,
so that our lives may reflect your generosity.

Creator God,
You gave us responsibility for the earth,
a world of riches and delight.
Create in us a desire to live sustainably,
so that those who follow after us
may enjoy the fruits of your creation.

God of peace and justice,
You give us the capacity to change,
to bring about a world that mirrors
your wisdom.
Create in us a desire to act in solidarity,
so that the pillars of injustice crumble
and those now crushed are set free.

Amen.

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Blessing

Leader: May our compassionate and loving God who calls us to live generous and fruitful lives bless and sustain us on our journey in faith.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us go in peace

All: And be messengers of hope.

Closing hymn

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