

# Motherhood: cliché and reality

## An all-age service for Mother's Day



### Introduction

In this act of worship we explore and celebrate real 21st century motherhood, with a view to supporting and empowering mothers and all people in mothering roles. Three biblical extracts are integrated to weave the sacred into the secular, enabling people to see the Gospels' relevance in everyday life. At the start of the service, the leader introduces some images and concepts of mothers and the roles they fulfil. Three themes emerge which are then explored through interactive discussion and reflection, each with a short accompanying Bible passage. There is an opportunity for everyone to be engaged and to participate.

### Preparation

- A list of props is given at the start of each activity and there are templates for photocopying/printing at the end of the service outline. Decide who is going to lead; different people could lead each activity, with a different voice for the Bible passages.
- Hymns and songs are suggested at various points. It is not necessary to use all of these suggestions, and singing may be appropriate at other places too. Other suitable hymns and songs include:  
Give me joy in my heart  
God is love his the care  
I, the Lord of sea and sky  
Let love be real in giving and receiving  
Let there be love shared among us

### Gather

#### Prepare the space

At the front of the worship space, make a display of three sets of images of mothers:

- 1 On one side put some Mother's Day cards with cute bunny and teddy images.
- 2 In the middle put some ordinary family photos of mothers, e.g. with children/babies, family groups, middle-aged and older mothers.
- 3 On the other side put some photos of women in public life, locally or nationally, who are mothers but that is not what they are primarily known for being. Include a picture of 'superwoman'.

*Play 'O when the saints go marching in' as background music while people come in.*

#### Call to worship

Let us worship God,

*Women:* **who is mother**

*Men:* **and father,**

*Leader:* **alpha and omega,**

*All:* **the beginning and the end,**

*Leader:* **life and being beyond all we can imagine.**

*All:* **We come to worship our God.**

#### Song

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

The version of this hymn in *Singing the Faith* is particularly appropriate.

### Informal talk: What is it about mothers?

During this talk, refer to images in the display (see *Prepare the space*).

- 1 Ask what mother-qualities are suggested by the mummy rabbits and teddies. Encourage a wide range of responses, both serious and more light-hearted – have some fun with this! But then ask, 'why are these images used by the card makers?' There are many possible answers, but they could probably be summarised as 'making the cards relevant to as wide an audience as possible' – both in terms of what they do, and do not, say about mothers. Suggest that this, perhaps, gives us a glimpse of the problem: that the portrayal of mothers and motherhood is not real, it is idealised.
- 2 Draw attention to the family photos. Ask people what qualities come to mind when they look at these images. Does relating to real people in this way help us to be more realistic, and less idealistic? The images show mothers at all stages of life; does the relationship with your mother change at different times in your life?
- 3 The final set of pictures introduces another aspect of 'idealism v realism'. What challenges, and perhaps prejudices, are experienced by women who are mothers and, at the same time, hold prominent, and particularly public, roles?

In short, is motherhood, as popularly perceived, affirming or confining? What are the real joys and challenges of motherhood?



# Open and explore the Word

## ✿ Like a mother hen

Think about a mother's natural instincts

### Bible reading Luke 13.34

Jesus said, 'Jerusalem...How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!'

### Explore together

**You will need:** hen and chick shapes cut from coloured paper or card (see templates on pp.4 and 5) – a ratio of about six chicks for each adult hen, in each colour. Cut out enough shapes for everyone to have one. These could be given out as people arrive, or at the beginning of this activity.

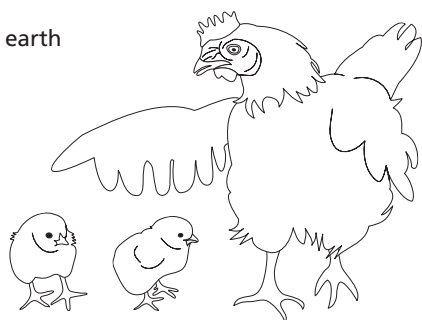
- Distribute the bird shapes randomly so that everyone has one but the colours and sizes are spread widely. Ask people to find others with whom to form a bird family group – i.e. one hen and about six chicks (the exact number is not important). When they have formed a family group, they should find a space where they can lay their birds down, with the chicks gathered 'under the wing' of the mother hen.
- Working in their groups, ask people to talk about birds and animals with their young. Have they seen family groups (if not in real life, then perhaps on a TV programme such as *Springwatch*)? Have they ever seen animals defending their young – what happens? The groups could invite some children to demonstrate adult animal behaviour, e.g. birds hissing, pecking or flapping. Is it the female/mummy or the male/daddy animal that does this? Is this the same – or different – for humans? Animal parents also know, instinctively, when to let their youngsters go. Babies of all kinds need special care and attention as they grow, but eventually they all need the freedom to explore the world around them. How do we relate to this?
- Now, ask people to pick up their hen or chick, and invite them to write on it a word or two that represents something they have learned or discussed about mothers, and to return to their original seats. When all are ready, end with this prayer.

Thank you, Lord, for our mothers,  
(and grandmothers, carers, etc. – as appropriate),  
and thank you for all those who know  
when we need to be held close,  
and when we need to be let go.

**Amen.**

### Song

For the beauty of the earth



For hen and chicks templates, see pp.4 and 5.

## ✿ Clichés

Identify real and perceived qualities of motherhood

### Bible reading Luke 8.19-21

Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.' But he said to them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'

### Explore together

**You will need:** plenty of sticky notes, and several large sheets of paper, e.g. flipchart paper.

- Ask everyone to think of a mother whom they know (perhaps their own mother, or a well-known mother figure). Invite them to say what special qualities that person has, then write these qualities on sticky notes and place them on a nearby wall. There are no right or wrong answers so write and stick up everything that is said.
- Refer again to the three sets of pictures (see *Prepare the space*). Invite people to suggest the qualities associated with each of the sets of images. Write the qualities onto three more sheets of paper, one for each set of images and labelled, respectively, 'CARDS', 'FAMILY' and 'SUPERWOMEN'. (If it doesn't happen naturally, you might like to suggest that use of the term 'superwomen' here refers not so much to the cartoon character, but to the demand on many women to excel both as mothers and in other roles simultaneously!)
- Now, ask people – or a representative group – to come and move all the sticky notes onto the three sheets of paper. If any do not match, leave the notes where they were. Keep moving them until all are (as far as possible) agreed on their final positions. When complete, ask people to spend a few moments considering the resulting displays. What qualities match up? What qualities have been left behind? Have any been left out altogether? How far might you describe some qualities, even a whole set, as clichés? Which qualities, or again, set of qualities, are the most real? What have we learned about real mothers from this? End with this prayer.

Thank you, Lord,  
for the riches of the human personality,  
for the many gifts and skills  
shown by all the women (and men) we know,  
and for your help in meeting all the circumstances –  
joyful and challenging – of family life.

**Amen.**

### Song

Tell out my soul

## Choices

### Find ways of supporting mothers

#### Bible reading John 19.26-27

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

#### Explore together

**You will need:** card or paper hand shapes (see template on p.6) and a few sticky notes of a different colour to those used for *Clichés*. You also need to prepare a table display at the front, of information about local family support resources, toddler groups, parenting classes, children's centres, afterschool clubs, breakfast clubs, the Mothers Union, food banks – and whatever else may be happening locally to support parents and families.

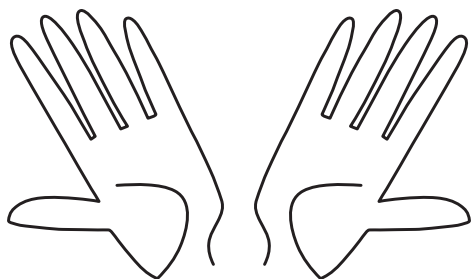
Invite people to look once again at the three sets of images (see *Prepare the space*), and the associated sheets of qualities (see *Clichés*).

- Draw attention to the table display of leaflets and other resources.
- Give out a hand-shaped card to each person and make some sticky notes available. Working in small groups with those immediately round them, which may appropriately be family groups, ask people to discuss whether there are practical things that they, individually or together, could do – or do better – to give support and help to mothers, parents and families locally, and to agree one specific thing that they can do. Invite them to write that agreed action onto their card hand to take away with them, and also onto one sticky note. The sticky note is then added to one of the displays, wherever the group thinks it is appropriate to do so.
- When all have returned to their places, invite everyone to look at the displays, with the realities and challenges of motherhood now laid over the clichés, and say this prayer.

Lord, we ask for guidance and strength to begin to address the challenges we see today, particularly in our local area.  
**Amen.**

#### Song

Brother, sister, let me serve you



For hands template, see p.6.

## Prayers

### Prayers of intercession

Lord, as a mother hen gathers her chicks, so you long to shield us from the harm that threatens us, or that we bring upon ourselves.

We know how easily we romanticise motherhood by thinking only of idealistic images; we pray for all women, and particularly mothers, mindful of the demands our society places on them, mindful of the pressures we place on them, knowing that we could offer more in the way of support: Lord, father and mother to us all,  
**help us to care as much as you care for us.**

We pray for mothers, and those in mothering roles, denied the opportunities that most of us – male, or richer, or child-free by choice – enjoy; for some the opportunity to make even simple choices, for others the choices that come from building careers, knowing that we are part of one humanity, one family: Lord, father and mother to us all,  
**help us to care as much as you care for us.**

We pray for mothers and fathers, women and men, where they go without so that their children can eat, where it is difficult to build a safe and secure home, where, for some, hope of any kind is not easy to find; whether this is through economic ills, or the result of war and violence, or any other threat: Lord, father and mother to us all,  
**help us to care as much as you care for us.**

We pray for families in which children are threatened by gangs, or drugs, or street-violence, or sexual abuse and exploitation; for mothers and carers who fear that their 'wings' are no longer enough to protect the family from the storms of life: Lord, father and mother to us all,  
**help us to care as much as you care for us. Amen.**

### A prayer of thanksgiving

Strong yet gentle God, hear our prayer of gratitude for all mothers. We give thanks not only for the mother figures in our own lives, but for the work and witness of women and men in parenting roles, in all times and in all places, as we acknowledge the importance of their contribution to the fullness of life that is your will for each and every one of us. In Jesus' name we pray.  
**Amen.**

Then all say together **The Lord's Prayer**

# Sending out

Ask people to take a few moments to look one final time at the displays of images and words. Invite them to consider the question, 'What could I do to help, support and empower mothers and all people in mothering roles today?'

## Song

Lord of all hopefulness

## Distribution of gifts

*If it is your custom to give flowers, cards or gifts you may use this prayer of blessing before giving them out.*

Loving God, you uphold us from birth to death,  
and through all life's changes,  
with your grace and love.  
In gratitude for all the love we have received,  
throughout our lives,  
may we be always ready to help those who are struggling,  
to protect the vulnerable,  
to feed the hungry,  
and to comfort the broken.  
Accept these flowers/cards/gifts  
as symbols of our ongoing love  
for those to whom we give them,  
and may we all be blessed in giving and receiving;  
in Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

*Arrange for the children to give a gift to everyone.*

## Song

Let there be love shared among us

## A sending out prayer

Standing with all those who have mothering roles in our society,  
let us pray for ourselves.

We pray for strength (*make a 'body builder' pose*).  
We pray for generosity (*hold out arms in a giving gesture*).  
We pray not to be judgemental (*wag one finger*).  
We pray to be able to inspire others to faith (*hold out one hand,  
and with the other point up*).  
We pray for joy in believing (*wave arms joyfully*).  
Lord God, hear our prayer;

**and send us to live as your children.**

**Amen.**

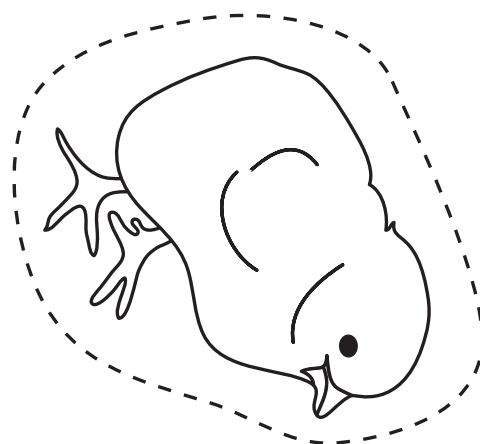
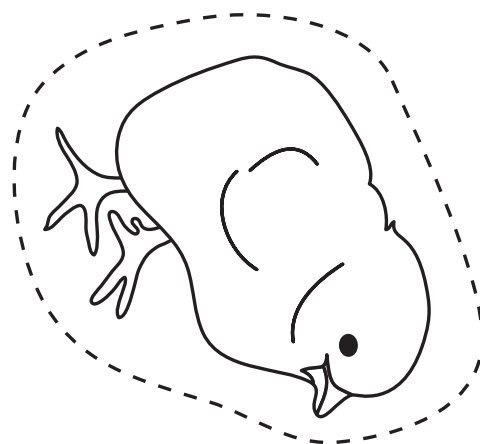
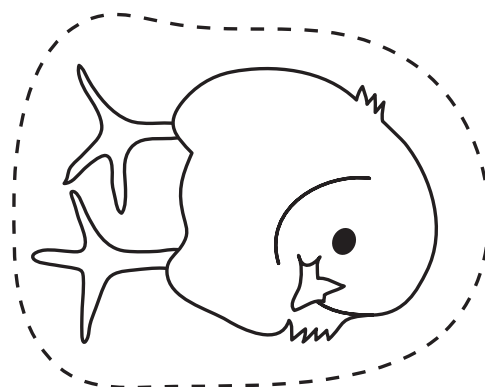
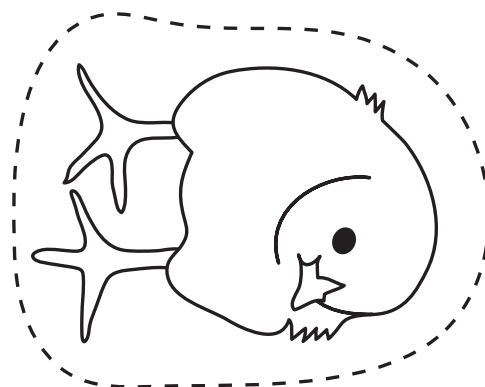
## The blessing

## Song

You shall go out with joy (*encourage clapping!*)

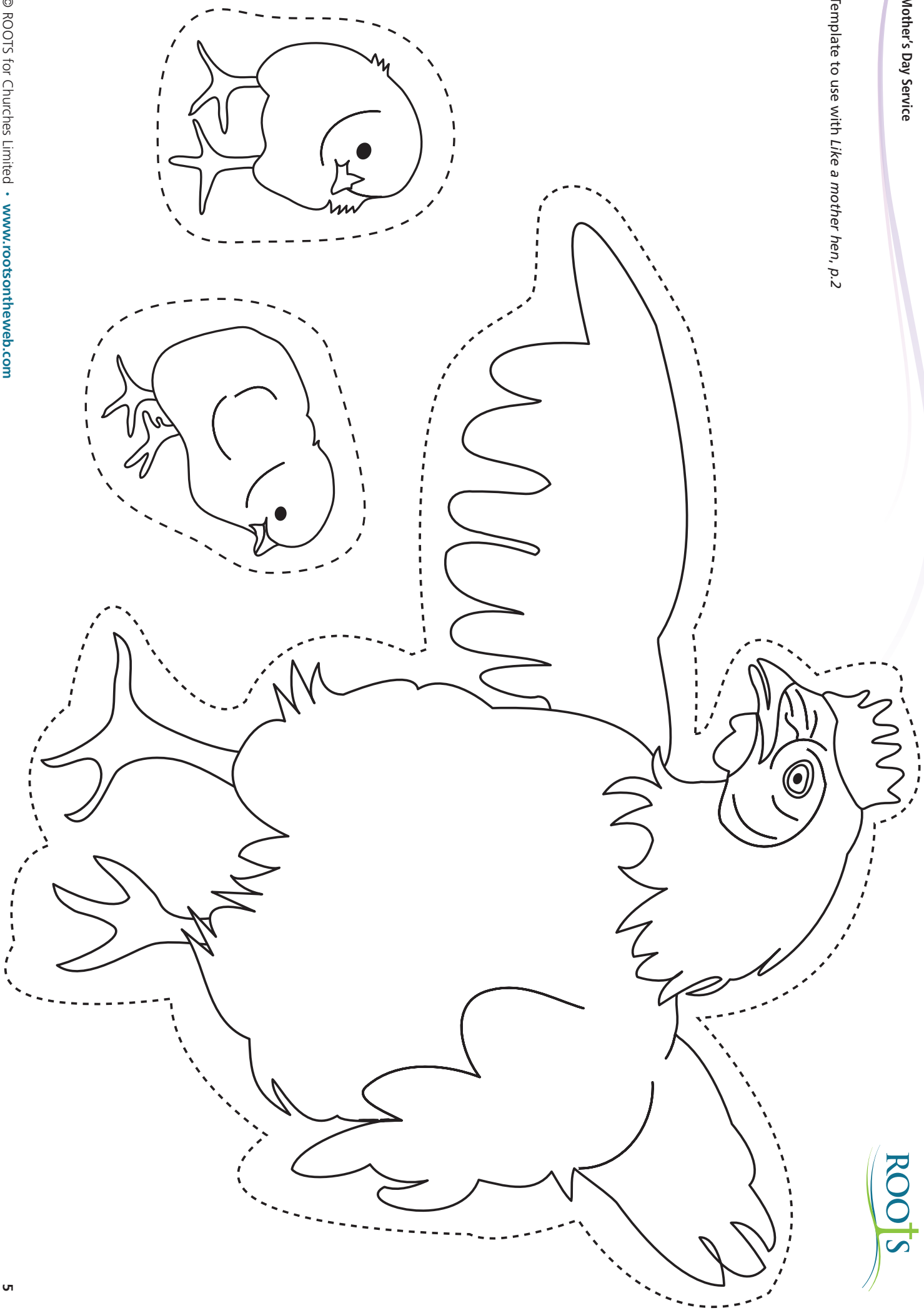
### Live in faith

Take your card hand with you (see *Choices*) and work out how you can begin to put that choice into action.



Template to use with *Like a mother hen*, p.2

Template to use with *Like a mother hen*, p. 2



Template to use with Choices, p.3

