



Celebrate Together All-age URC Service Outline for 2022

To do/prepare:

Powerpoint

Find an older person to light the candles/child to help blow out candles

Ask three people to help tie bunches of balloons

20 balloons blown up and around church, possibly with ribbon pre-attached [20 outlines of balloon]

20 permanent markers or labels/stickers and pens (to write on balloons)

Dining table/trestle table (or use normal table for worship)

Papers/books/magazines/dirty cups/plates/clothes/craft supplies – covering table

Party tablecloth

URC 50th anniversary cake – ask someone to make one

Gluten Free/vegan cake options

Welcome: *(especially to any visiting families from Messy Church or Toddler group for example and explain that today is an all-ages service so everyone is encouraged to participate)*

Song: choose something which is appropriate for all ages: Sing Shout clap your hands / come on let's celebrate / welcome everybody

Call to Worship:

Today we are also celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the United Reformed Church. In 1972, the URC was formed when two different denominations, Congregationalists and English Presbyterians, merged and later were joined by the Churches of Christ in 1981 and the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000. So today is a special celebration Sunday and we are celebrating the URC's Jubilee – our 50th birthday.

I wonder if anyone has had a birthday or anniversary recently?

Who has had the most number of birthdays? The least?

Turn to the person next to you and share about a favourite party - either your own or one you've been to as a guest.

Time – then call back with party hooter?

When you're really excited, or perhaps really happy, I wonder what you like to say – **Hooray?**...let's give that a go together (1,2,3...Hooray!).

How about **"Yes"** - perhaps with a bit of a fist pump (1,2,3...Yes).

Anything else? *Perhaps local or cultural saying? "X"* (1,2,3...X!).

This time, choose whatever you like (1, 2, 3... Hooray!/Yes/X!)
Excellent!

Our call to worship this morning is a call to celebration and is based on Psalm 100.

As well as joining in with the words in bold, whenever I say “1,2,3” you’re invited to join in with “Hooray”, “Yes”, “X” or whatever words that express joy for you.
Sound OK? 1,2,3...

(PP) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth! **(1,2,3...)**
(together)

We will worship the Lord with gladness.

We will come before God with joyful songs.

(PP) The Lord is God. It is God who made us and we are his.

We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

We enter God’s gates with thanksgiving.

We come to God’s courts with praise.

(1,2,3...)

(PP) The Lord is good and his love endures forever.

God’s faithfulness continues through all generations.

(1,2,3...)

(together)**Amen!**

Let’s sing together and celebrate God’s faithfulness. Please stand as you are able.

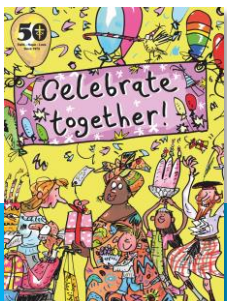
Song: eg Lord I come before your throne of grace (What a Faithful God); Come people of the Risen King (New Song)

Prayer of praise and thanksgiving:

On Anniversaries and at parties we might have speeches and we might think about all the things we appreciate about the person or anniversary that we are celebrating.

Today as we celebrate the United Reformed Church turning 50, I wonder what you appreciate about the URC or about *[name of church where gathered]*? It might be that you can come here as a family or that there’s a group or club you are welcome at. Or it might be a place where you have made friends or grown as a friend of Jesus.
We are going to share our prayers of thanks and praise to God with each other.

May I have a couple of helpers please – I don’t mind what age. Just wait here.



I invite everyone to get into groups of 3 or 4 and find a balloon. If you can’t find a balloon just wait for another group and ask for theirs afterwards.

Our helpers will bring a pen to each person with a balloon (*hand out permanent markers*).

In your groups, share as a prayer what you thank God for and praise God for... it might be something about XXX church or the wider United Reformed Church. Write or draw each prayer on your balloon, leaving space for any nearby groups if needed.

[alternatively invite people to bat the balloon about in a group and, as you hit the balloon, call out “thank you for.... “ or “praise God for....” – and provide a picture of a balloon outline and pen for someone to capture the prayers in written form]

In a few minutes ***you'll hear some music play*** and that means it's time to finish your prayer and we'll collect up the balloons/pictures.

I invite you to pray together your prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

When it seems time... play intro of next song.

Please finish off your prayers. If you've finished, please bring your balloons out the front over here and my helpers will tie the balloons together.

I invite you all to stand as you are able for our next song and let's celebrate our great God.

Have a couple of helpers tie the ribbons and balloons together in bunches and hang around stage and coffee areas of church during next songs. [or stick up the pictures with written prayers]

Song: eg 10,9,8 God is great (DVD)

Notices:

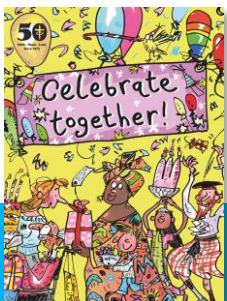
Can this person if usually there is a children's program and/or a creche, explain to any visitors that today all children are welcome to remain in church as this is an all-age, participatory service. If your child becomes upset or needs a different space, please move to [area] and [volunteer] is available to assist you.

Offering:

Song during offering: eg Clap your hands and celebrate, Praise is rising (Hosanna),

Offering prayer:

Amazing God, people often bring gifts to a party. But you have showered us with gifts. You give us life and love and all of creation, and especially you gave us Jesus to be our friend and to show us the way to live as your children. We bring these gifts of money as a way to say thank you. Please use them and use us to help your people, your church and your world and to spread your good news. Amen



Message:

In the Bible there are lots of stories about parties and celebrations.
Call out any Bible party stories you can think of.

The Bible tells us that Jesus went to parties, including weddings and dinner parties in people's homes. Jesus also told stories about parties and banquets.

So, let's pretend we're hosting a party, a BIG celebration, here [name area of church at front].

Here's our table. (*Dining-style table covered in papers/books/ craft supplies.*)

What do we need to do next to get ready for our party?

Hmmm, this is a bit of a mess....

What about cleaning the house? Preparing the party space? If your house is like ours, your dining table might look a bit like this? *Papers, files, newspapers, junk mail etc...*

Sometimes to prepare for a party we have to clean up first.

But do you know that God comes to us in the midst of our mess? Jesus went to many parties with people whose lives were very messy.

Jesus shows us that God doesn't want us to stay living in our mess that Jesus came to show us a new way to live that through Jesus we could be forgiven and have a chance for a fresh start, to wipe the slate clean.

As we prepare for our celebration here today (*point to table*), let's take a moment to confess our lives before God. Because every day, and many moments throughout each day, no matter how long we've known Jesus for, we still stuff up and make a mess and the amazingly GREAT news is that we can keep coming to God and saying we're sorry, confessing our mess, and accepting forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ.

- **Prayers of confession....**

As we enter our time of Confession this morning, I invite you, if you are comfortable, to **hold your hands in your lap**. As you do, you might want to think about your past week – all that has happened, the good and not so good (pause).

You might like to **open up your hands, spread out your fingers**. As you do, you might want to think about the people that know you well and what you have done with them across your week (pause).

Sometimes things don't turn out as we expect. Sometimes things can end up in a bit of a mess – we might hurt others, others might hurt us. **Grip your hands together and squeeze** as you say sorry to God (pause).



We're going to say together a prayer and, as we do, I invite you, in your own time, to **place your hands in your lap again.**

Let's pray...

Merciful God, Creator and Redeemer, you know us completely and love us utterly. There is not a thought or feeling, word or action, memory or hope, that you do not see and understand. We are sorry.

Please forgive our sins and remove our shame, renew our faith and enlarge our love. Let all that is true, beautiful and compassionate find a new lease of life in our character. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(PP) DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Christ Jesus did not arrive in this world to condemn us, but that the world through him might be rescued and healed. Hear with confidence as I declare to you Our sins are forgiven, **Thanks be to God**

[OR simpler version:

God you know what I said – **SORRY**

God you know what I did – **SORRY**

God you know what I didn't do – **SORRY**

God you know what I allowed – **SORRY**

God you know what I ignored – **SORRY**

God you know what I held back – **SORRY**

God you know what I thought – **SORRY**

God forgive me and help me to forgive others.

Make today a new start.

You are forgiven. You are loved. You are new.

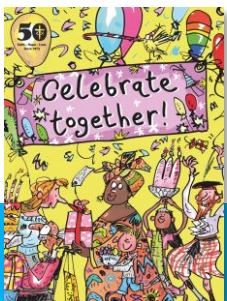
Thank you. Amen.]

So, no matter the mess of our homes or our lives, we can still celebrate. Sometimes the best celebrations come out of the hardest or messiest times. Celebrating the birthday after getting the all-clear from cancer; celebrating the birth of a baby after a miscarriage; celebrating a wedding anniversary after marriage counselling. To live with joy requires knowing sorrow. I wonder if to celebrate well requires knowing loss.

Put party tablecloth on table.

What else do we need to prepare for our party? What else happens at a party?

- **Invitations** (SMS on phone, handwrite notes, phone people) or I could just say: "Today, you are all welcome to join in our celebration."



- **Decorations** (we've got balloons, how about some streamers...)
- **Food/drinks**– Call out your favourite party food!
Most parties have a cake! Ian, can you please bring in our cake.
We will be sharing a cake to celebrate the United Reformed Church's 50th Anniversary. We are here today celebrating being one part of God's wider family.
- **Entertainment/music** – We could play some games like pass the parcel or we could dance. Today let's sing and dance together. I invite you to stand as we sing
- **Song:** Teach me to dance
- **The Word: Luke 14:15 - 24**

Often at parties and celebrations there'll be speeches, some are funny or try to be, others share memories, often there's lots of thank you's....

(PP) One day Jesus was at a dinner party and one of the guests said to Jesus, "The greatest blessing of all is to be at the banquet in God's kingdom!"

Then Jesus said told this story:

A man once gave a great banquet and invited a lot of guests.

Hang on a minute, before we get into the story, I'm going to need a few helpers of all ages. Is there someone who can be a servant? Great, please, come up here.

And is there someone in the front row willing to read a line that will be on the screen please? And are there 2 people over here willing to read a line that will be on the screen please?

Okay, everyone else please be prepared to join in when asked.

So let's start again, Then Jesus told this story: A man once gave a great banquet and invited a lot of guests.

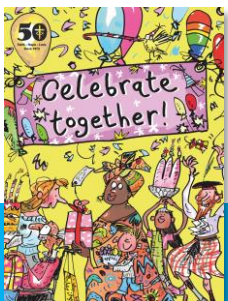
So you'd be invited, front row, and all of you over here are invited. Woo hoo! You've been invited to a great banquet.

(PP) ¹⁷ When the banquet was ready, the man sent a servant to tell the guests, "Everything is ready! Please come." *Servant, please go and tell these guests here that everything is ready, please come.*

(PP) *But* ¹⁸ One guest after another started making excuses. The first one said, "I bought some land, and I've got to look it over. Please excuse me."

¹⁹ Another guest said, "I bought five teams of oxen, and I need to try them out. Please excuse me."

²⁰ Still another guest said, "I have just gotten married, and I can't be there."



(PP) ²¹ The servant told his master what happened, and the master became so angry (*can everyone do an angry face*) the master became so angry that he said, “Go as fast as you can to every street and alley in town! Bring in everyone who is poor or crippled or blind or lame.”

Servant, go to all the people back there and bring them and their children. And what about those people back there, go and get them too.

(PP) ²² When the servant returned, he said, “**Master, I’ve done what you told me, and there is still plenty of room for more people.**”

²³ His master then told him, “Go out along the back roads and fence rows and make people come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ Not one of the guests I first invited will get even a bite of my food!”

Go servant, go. Down the back there, invite them all, bring them along. Come in, come in, make space for more people. There’s enough for everyone. You are all welcome.

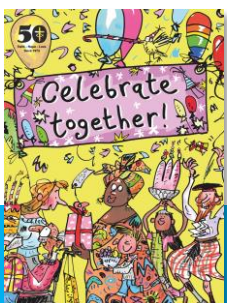
Wow! What a story! Can you imagine what that banquet would be like? Probably a bit messy and it might feel out of control but I think the room would be full of joy and excitement!

To those of you still in your seats, thank you for being gracious in playing your part of that story. I invite you now, if you are able, to come forward too and join us. Can I also encourage people to make sure that no one is left on their own, feel free to form a group of 2 or 3 where you are seated.

Look around at us. Here we are God’s family at [name of Church]. Maybe we’re here because we love God or maybe we want to find out more about God’s love for us.

Maybe we love the people who are here or maybe we want to know that others love and accept us. Maybe we were invited here and came for the first time – it’s not always quite like this. But do you know what, **this is us**, every week, all of us here, celebrating God’s love for us and sharing God’s love with others.

This story of the banquet told by Jesus illustrates that everyone is invited to celebrate life with God and that we each have a choice about how we will respond. Will we say yes to God’s invitation? Or will we be too busy or distracted to realise the most amazing invitation we’ve ever been given? Will we play our part in ensuring everyone knows they are invited?



Even if you said yes to the invitation a while ago, really, it is every day that we need to say yes, every day that we thank God for God's amazing grace and never-ending love. We can't take our invitation for granted, remember it every day and if you need to, maybe it's time to say yes to God again.

Let's pray together for ourselves and for others:

We bring to you Loving God our prayers for those around us here today at [name of church]. We pray for this [name of service/congregation] community and for those not able to be with us today. We pray for [other congregations eg Messy Church community / other local churches]. We pray for all the groups that meet here [name them – eg the craft group, youth group, seniors group, playgroups] and all those who use our premises [name them – eg Weight Watchers, food bank, Guide/Scout groups]. We also pray for the local community [name key areas/local schools etc]. May everyone know your invitation to come and join the party.

And everyone said, Amen.

Please return to your seats apart from [invite older person] I invite to light the candles and cut the cake. And [child] nearby, would they and any others – old or young – like to **help blow out the candles after we've sung happy birthday (NB if concerned about Covid – just waft candles out).**

Light candles – then

Let's sing Happy Birthday to the United Reformed Church.

Blow out candles and cut the cake –

We will share this wonderful cake (and gluten-free etc options) together after the service. Is there someone not here today you could take a piece of cake to? Maybe share the good news of God's invitation?

I invite you to think of someone you'll invite to a meal or share a cuppa with or visit or contact to share hospitality with sometime in the next two weeks.

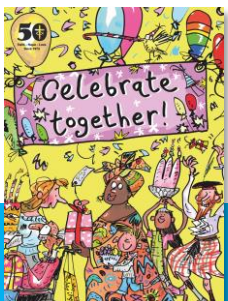
Now turn to someone near you and tell them the name of the person or family you're going to contact.

If you're comfortable, put your hand on one another's shoulder.

I'll lead us in prayer and I invite you to say Amen with me at the end.

Let's pray: Loving God, you have heard those names spoken aloud or thought of. Prompt us, by your Spirit, to make contact, to offer an invitation this week. Help us to follow in the way of Jesus and share hospitality with people, to celebrate life with them. Generous God, we pray for each of those people and families who we have named, may they know your amazing love, may they meet Jesus and may lives change.

And everyone said, Amen.



Song: May our homes be filled with dancing

In the book *“Starting your Messy Church”* by Lucy Moore and Jane Leadbetter, it says: “Celebration is about the joy of being a child of God and a member of this marvellous body we call the church. It’s about saying yes, there is a huge amount to celebrate in our faith life, even if the world around us is falling apart.

It’s also about celebrating in the sense of ‘marking’ or ‘recognising as significant’ each person,... each family,... the church community... and the God we serve.” (P21)

Benediction:

May God the ultimate party host inspire, encourage and prompt each of us to share and celebrate life with others.

You are all invited to please join us for a cuppa and cake (there’s a gluten free option too) and we look forward to celebrating with many of you at [other Jubilee celebration events].

We have copies of a picture book for everyone to take away – Celebrate Together – which is the story of a party and gives insights into the wider life of the URC today.

The Great Banquet (CEV)

¹⁵ After Jesus had finished speaking, one of the guests said, “The greatest blessing of all is to be at the banquet in God’s kingdom!”

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