



## Gathering Together

### A service outline for use in schools to acknowledge loss and celebrate life

Please ensure that those involved in organising and leading the service have used the accompanying notes when planning for their individual school context. Careful consideration should be given to the ways in which the service will be facilitated in each school setting. For example, it may be appropriate to leave out the later responses section when using with younger children. Opportunities to pause for reflection or moments of silence do not have to be long (30 seconds may be enough) but are important and should be included.

### Gather

Suggested music to play as the school community gathers: Leona Lewis, 'Footprints in the sand'.

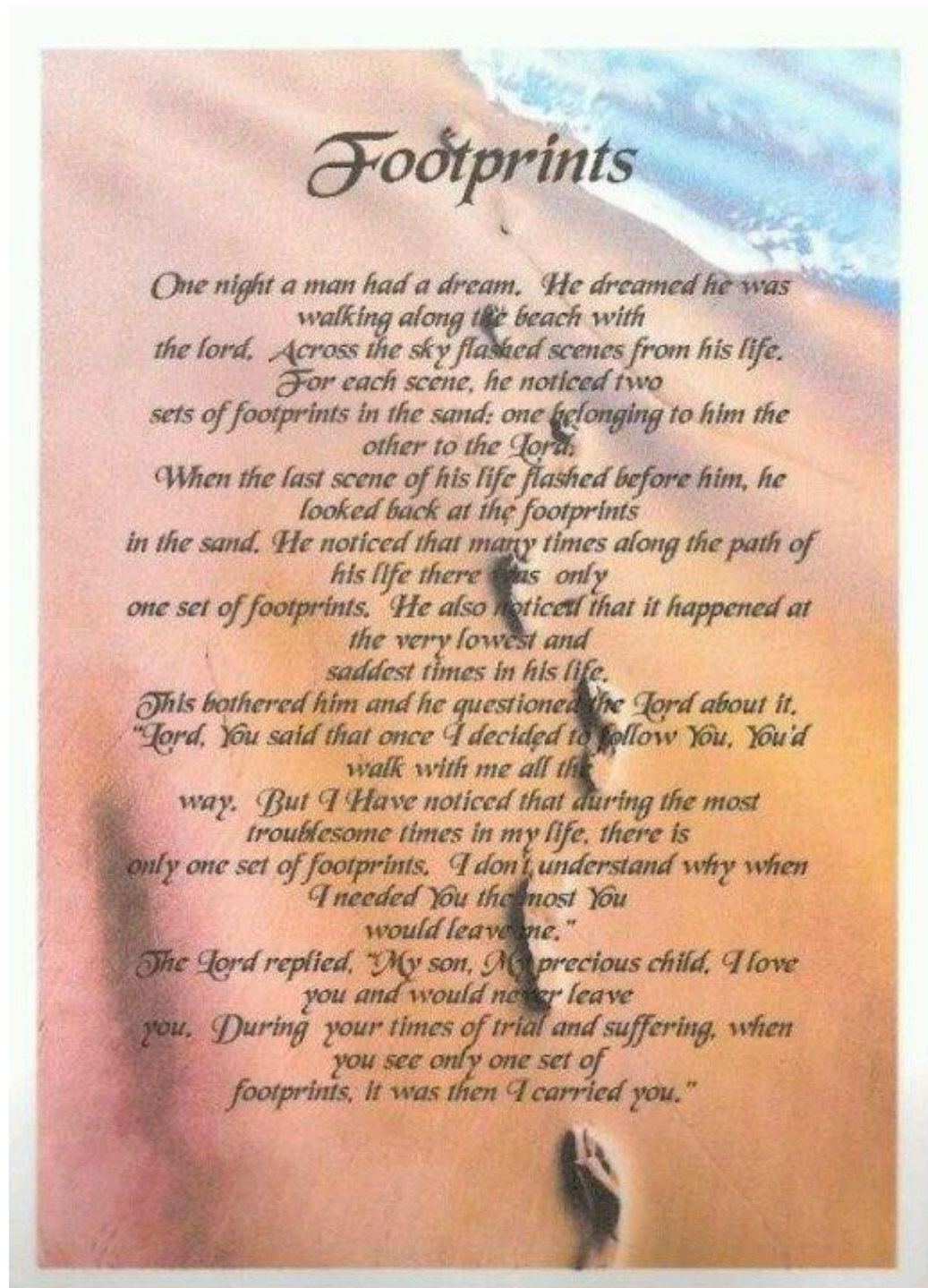
**Leader:** As we gather together today, we come as Travellers or Pilgrims recognising God's presence with us as we travel. God is present in our conversations and in our rememberings, as he was with the Pilgrims beginning their journey to Jerusalem to worship God at the Temple. So we read in Psalm 121:

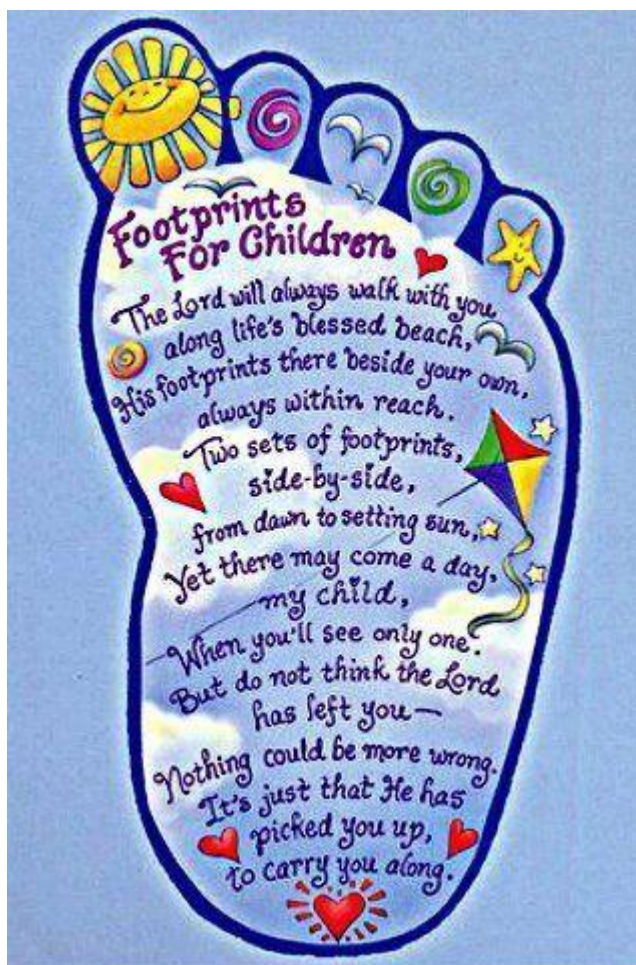
'I lift my eyes to the hills –  
where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
the maker of heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot slip –  
he who watches over you  
will not slumber;  
indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord watches over you –  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;  
the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all harm –  
he will watch over your life;  
the Lord will watch over your coming and going  
both now and for evermore.'

We are all on a journey and we are each at different stages on that journey. However, the same God is with us each step of the way.

Before we listen to this reading of 'Footprints in the sand' let us reflect for a moment on our memories of sand and the way we can make marks in the sand. On the floor in front of you or in your imagination/mind's eye, draw your name with your finger.

**Reader:** Read a suitable version of the 'Footprints in the sand' poem. Could also refer to the Leona Lewis song which was playing as we gathered together.





Leader: 'We gather here today to think about (name(s)). To celebrate their life (lives) and acknowledge how sad it is that they are no longer with us. We thank God (We give thanks for) for the gift of (name(s)) and for his love for us (the love that surrounds us) as we share together in our grief and sorrow.'

We recognise that some of us will be grieving for the first time. We might be sad/grieving for what has happened. For the big changes we have experienced in our lives. For tough times at home. We recognise that we still have these feelings. We may be affected by the stories we see in the news and we may feel a personal connection even though we don't know the people involved.

## Engage

Reader / group presenting: Luke 24. 13-35, On the road to Emmaus.

A reflection:

"This is one of my favourite stories in the Bible. Two friends walking home from Jerusalem in a heightened state of anxiety and confusion. Deep in conversation. Asking and debating. Seeking answers: Why did he have to die? He was such an amazing teacher. We learned so much about God from him that we never knew before. He really put those Pharisees in their place. Remember how he overturned the tables in the

Temple? That's when we really thought, 'This is it. He's going to make his mark soon. Then the Romans won't know what's hit them!'

So why did he let them crucify him? It doesn't make sense. And what about the women finding the tomb empty ... seeing angels? None of it makes any sense.

And as they walked and talked and wondered and questioned and discussed, Jesus joined them, asking them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'

What a great question and a great way to join in the conversation. Jesus comes alongside, seeks to understand where they are at as he listens to their response to his question, then joins the conversation at the right point and seeks to help them move forward in their thinking and understanding.

Although they recognise Jesus as a 'prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people' (v19), they have not yet understood his divine nature, although they did believe 'he was the one who was going to redeem Israel' (v19b). So Jesus opens up the scriptures to them – showing them from these teachings how it was that he fulfilled all that had been spoken by the Prophets.

As their 'hearts burned within them', still their eyes were not open to see Jesus before them. So Jesus accepts their invitation to join them for a meal; to spend more time with them, to do something ordinary with them like eating a meal. Finally, when Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them, their eyes were opened and they recognised him. And ... he disappeared from their sight."

**Leader:** I wonder where we might recognise that Jesus has been with us?

God promises to be with us in the storms. When David cries out to God in Psalm 61, 'God, listen to me shout, bend an ear to my prayer', he recognises that God has 'always given me breathing room, a place to get away from it all. A lifetime pass to your safe-house, an open invitation as your guest' (*The Message* version).

Jesus walked and talked with the two friends on the road to Emmaus. He listened to them and joined the conversation where they were at.

## Respond

*Prayer*

*Heavenly father, thank you for (name(s)) and all that they meant to us.*

*(If appropriate encourage people to share short sentences of what they are thankful for, (e.g. her big smile, his football skills, etc.)*

*The Bible says you love all that you have made, and whilst we might not ever understand why bad things happen, we ask that we will know your comfort and peace in the midst of our sadness.*

*Amen*

In Genesis 28, Jacob has a dream at Bethel and afterwards acknowledges the presence of God in that place. He creates a marker or altar at the place where he had a dream by setting up the stone he had used as a pillow as he slept, as we might mark the top of a mountain or set up cairns to guide us along the way.



Provide an opportunity to create an 'altar moment' using whatever images/objects have been created or used as a vehicle for remembering / celebrating / expressing fears. This could simply be standing together to show solidarity/support through holding the object. It could also involve creating a physical space where the objects could be left. Another possibility is allowing pupils to take their objects home so they can carry the service with them and engage in personal prayer if they want to.

See accompanying notes for suggestions. Also, the CEEO resource *Never the Same*, p.25, for further Memorial activities.

## Send

**Leader:** As the travellers or pilgrims reached the Temple in Jerusalem they were able to praise God at last;

"Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who minister by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord. May the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion'.

The Christian belief in the resurrection gives hope for the future: 1 Corinthians 15.20 says, 'Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep'.

As we leave this service today, let us carry on walking and talking and journeying together, knowing that God is ever present with us on the journey.

**Closing prayer:**

'The Lord bless you and keep you;  
The Lord make his face shine upon you  
And be gracious to you;  
The Lord turn his face towards you  
And give you peace'  
Numbers 6.24-26

**Music:** Play the UK blessing / The blessing (Kids) as people leave their memorials and depart.

**Acknowledgement:** words in italics are taken from the CEEO publication *Never the Same*.

**Thank you** to the DBE working group: Rev Mark Cantrill, Anna Martin, Father Tom Meyrick, Clare Middleton, and to Kate Charlesworth (Farnsfield St Michael's CofE Primary School)

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