

## On your marks

The fourth Sunday of Lent is celebrated as Mothering Sunday – a tradition that goes back to the Middle Ages in Britain. It was originally a time to focus on ‘mother church’ and was often an occasion to go on a pilgrimage to the largest church in the region, usually the cathedral. This day in turn also became a ‘day off’ for young girls – particularly those who were ‘in service’ and living away from home – and they were allowed to go home and visit their mothers.

Today, of course, Mothering Sunday has become one of the most popular celebrations outside Christmas and many churches experience it as one of their most attended services in the year, as large numbers gather to give thanks to God for mothers and all those who offer mother-like nurture to others.

## Get set

To set the theme for the service and introduce the idea of ‘mother-like’ nurture, which can be offered by many different people, including mothers, collect images from magazines, newspapers and the Internet of the following:

- a school-crossing patrol lady;
- a childminder;
- a grandmother;
- a teacher with a class;
- a babysitter;
- a godmother;
- a member of your church crèche team;
- a nursery group leader;
- an aunty;
- a games coach;
- a uniformed organisation leader;
- a carer in a home;
- a missionary nurse/doctor or teacher;
- a Sunday group or midweek group leader.

Can you think of any more?

You might also like to ask some of the mums in your congregation to bring along some pictures.

Enlarge these pictures and put them up on a large central display board(s) around the church worship area. These can be used as a focus for the prayers. Alternatively, or in addition, create a PowerPoint presentation of these images to run as the congregation gathers and later during the prayers.

Select some individuals or groups (adults and children) from your congregation to read the

sentences and verses given below during the service. They should stand near the display board(s). After each reading, the congregational response is:

*Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.*

## Go!

Today, we are giving thanks to God for the gift of mothers and the mother-like nurture that many people show to others in their lives.

- Isaiah wrote that God is a mother to us, comforting and carrying us in her arms: *As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you...* (Isaiah 66:13, NIV1984).

*Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.*

- Isaiah also wrote that God would never forget us. He knows each of us, like a mother knows her own children: *Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!* (Isaiah 49:15, NIV1984).

*Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.*

- David wrote that in God's presence, he was quiet and at peace, trusting his mother God like a child safe in loving arms: *But I have stilled and quietened my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me* (Psalm 131:2, NIV1984).

*Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.*

- Jesus spoke of himself as a mother, longing to wrap his arms around us, like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing* (Matthew 23:37, NIV1984).

*Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.*

- Paul writes about his missionary ministry and likens his work to that of a nurse who looks after those in her care: *but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children* (1 Thessalonians 2:7, NIV1984).

*Loving Lord, thank you for your tender care.*