

Mission Community Celebration/Commissioning

OFFERTORY

In the Liturgy the **'Offertory'** is one of the points where we recognise that church and community are integrally linked. God's grace extends not only through our churches but throughout the world. *Everything in heaven and on earth is yours.* The gift of life itself is to be found in the abundance of the fruits of the Earth and developed through our creativity: *Earth has given and human hands have made...*

The Offertory makes a special point in the service where such gifts are recognised and brought forward and seen as part of the purposes of God. *All things come from you and of your own do we give you...*

Conventionally, these include money from a collection or from regular giving, together with the elements of bread, wine and water prior to consecration. And they are all seen as resourcing us to the further service of all God's Creation.

In Jewish worship these offerings are seen as having cosmic significance. They are tangible and remarkable expressions of the God who transcends the Universe and where the Earth is deeply sacred.

More imaginatively, other gifts from the broader community might be brought forward. These could include political concerns (e.g. a petition on international poverty, or a letter to the council on a local concern such as Residential Care); local produce or artistic work that brings life to the community; flowers, seeds or saplings to be planted in the area; children's toys; prayer cards or candles; stories from Rough Sleepers or those seeking sanctuary; icons, books, posters, banners; artifacts (carvings, pottery, sculptures), elements (stones, ice, flames) and even people.

Sometimes a powerful symbol like a piece of art can effectively draw attention to a real human challenge or celebrative opportunity. For example, to coincide with the UN Conference on Climate Change in Denmark, three objects are circulating local churches to draw attention to global warming: a withered ear of maize (from an African drought), a piece of dead coral (from the Pacific) and a fragment of glacial rock (from the Alps). All of these signify calamities currently facing human and non-human communities, and they form a powerful focal point for worshipping our Creator-Saviour God.

In terms of Mission Communities and their commissioning, the inclusion of some form of Offertory from the wider society is to be encouraged. The church cannot live in isolation from the rest of God's world and a Mission Community making strong reference to the context in which it exists is important. All is to be dedicated to the service of God in the world.

We could use our offertories much more creatively and at the same time bring in to our church rites parts of our community life which we often ignore (or are ignorant about!).