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**FROM THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH SYDNEY UNITING CHURCH
TO ALL THOSE WHO SUFFER IN THE DROUGHT:**

We are a small congregation in the heart of one of the more struggling places in the city of Sydney. We have few resources to offer to our sisters and brothers in other struggling places, but we would like to give you our Advent liturgy as a sign of our sharing of life with you. We would also like to receive some human stories about life in the drought, if you would send them to us. These stories we would read in our church services and, if they are sent by Nov 29 in a form suitable for a mainly secular audience, we would print some of them in our paper. This is "The South Sydney Herald", which is the only local paper for most of South Sydney (Redfern, Waterloo and other suburbs) and is distributed free to 14,000 households each month by community volunteers.

AN ADVENT LITURGY

The Gospel reading for the first Sunday in Advent has inspired this liturgy as its imagery connected so well with our present summer.

Obviously parts or all of this liturgy may be used or adapted. Some people may like the symbols and symbolic acts, others not. You may choose to use quite different symbols.

For this liturgy you will need

*An advent cloth on the table or flowing from the table onto the floor
and down the central aisle*

A set of advent candles

Symbols for each Sunday in Advent : A Bible, some small candles, some wild berries and plants, rock or concrete and a some blades of grass.

Small strips of gold ribbon or thread with safety pins attached in a basket on the table

THE SUMMER IS NEAR

CALL TO WORSHIP

The parched earth cracks and groans
under the blazing sun across the wide land,
and the trees droop in the hot wind
as we search the horizons for clouds
and wait for the cooler darkness.

***In faith and hope we wait
in this time of Advent.***

After the suffering in these days,
the Child of God will be seen
deep in the heart of summer,
gentle in the centre of harshness,
and vulnerable in the midst of our vulnerability,
frail but sure sign
of the promises of God.

In faith and hope, let us worship God.

HYMN

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

First Sunday in Advent

We light this candle as a sign
that heaven and earth may pass away,
but the word of God will be present in the world
forever and forever.

The candle is lit and the Bible is placed

Second Sunday in Advent

We light this candle as a sign
that among the locusts and wild honey,
in the wilderness of life a sure voice rises,
calling us on to prepare the way for our God.

The candle is lit and weeds and berries are placed

Third Sunday in Advent

We light this candle as a sign
that in the darkness of the struggle for life,
the light is surely coming,
the light for all the world in every generation.

The candle is lit and a circle of small candles around it

Fourth Sunday in Advent

We light this candle as a sign
that God conceives and creates in barren places,
that new life will arise within the empty wombs of life,
for nothing is impossible with God.

*The candle is lit and a symbol of surviving life is placed,
such as a fragile blade of grass between concrete or rocks.*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, as we enter the season of Advent, the waiting time,
we confess that there are many things about our own life

and the life of the world
which test our faith in your coming in love.
When the struggle in our own lives overwhelms us:

Come to us in grace, O God.

When we can only think of violence as the path to peace
and our trust in the possibility of human community wears thin:

Come to us in grace, O God.

When we feel that the universe itself is challenging your grace
and your word is hard to find:

Come to us in grace, O God,

for we are your humble people on a hard journey.

Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus,
neither the droughts of the land or the droughts of the soul.

The Christ will come,
even when there seems to be no room
and no place prepared.

Grace is ours, love will come to us and to all humankind.

Thanks be to God.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

When life seems hard, we give you thanks for unexpected things:
gifts which arise in tough places from people who have little,
surprising sharing which did not seem to be there
until we all had less than before,

community which deepens in the face of need
and faith which is born in nothing but hope
and the age-long testimony of your faithfulness, O God.

Thanks be to you, Jesus Christ,

***Thanks be to you Holy Spirit and great Creator,
who is making all things new.***

Amen.

READINGS

HYMN

SERMON

SIGNS IN THE WAITING

In response to the word,
let us look for signs of love which are already among us.
Let us name some of those signs
and pin a golden ribbon to the advent cloth,

a golden glimpse of summer,
to remind us of the hope that already lies here:
The people do so

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

When the star-sign shows weak
above the blinding lights of the city
it will hang low and bright
over the waiting landscape of desert and farmland:

The Christ is coming in love for all the people.

When the shepherds wait in faith in the fields
the songs of hope will sound forth
from the gathered choirs in the streets in the distance,
sharing the gifts for now and the gifts to come
in the spirit of the One who is near:

The Christ is coming in love for all the people

We will prepare the way,
opening wide the doors of waiting stables,
dressing them in compassion,
carrying the remnant flocks in our arms,
holding them firmly in hope stretched thin.
We will prepare our gifts as the wise ones of old,
making ready to carry them
to the places where the Christchild is unexpectedly born.

The Christ is coming in love for all the people.

The summer of Christmas is near.

OFFERING

HYMN

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

O God of hope and bearer of peace,
we remember before you this day
those who most long for love to be born among them
those near to us and those far away:

The people pray

Do not leave us comfortless, O God.

Send to us the signs that the waiting will not be forever.

Point us to the tender greening of new life,
the fragile signs of our survivals,
the small watery trickles of things to come.

Send to us the signs that the waiting will not be forever.

Transform the fires of our burning
into gathered care for all who grieve and suffer loss,
tiny candles lit beside the manger which carries your life.

Send to us the signs that the waiting will not be forever.

Come into our world, Jesus Christ,
come and lead us on into the ways of peace and grace,
come and be the summer of the earth
which brings fruitfulness and the miracle of new life.

***Send to us the signs that the waiting will not be forever,
for we pray in faith,
Amen.***

HYMN

SENDING OUT AND BLESSING

Go in trembling hope to point to the signs of love.
Go in peace, for God will not fail us.

And may the star-light of the heavens bring promises each night,
the signs of coming life be near our feet as we walk
and the hand of God reach out in all the earth
for the creation of a new future.

Amen.