



**Methodist Women
in Britain**

For women, for justice, for Christ

Butterfly Service of Thanksgiving and Affirmation

Call to Worship.

Leader: Come, people of God, let us gather in gratitude and in hope.

All: We come to thank God for healing, courage, and change.

Leader: God calls us to stand with the vulnerable, to speak truth, and to live in love.

All: We come to celebrate God's justice and mercy.

Leader: Come, Holy Spirit — fill this place with Your peace and power,

as we worship the God who makes all things new.

All: Amen.

Suggested Hymn StF 615 Let love be real

Prayer of Approach

Gracious and loving God, we come before You in thanksgiving for Your goodness and mercy.

You have created every person in Your image,

and called us to live in relationships of love, respect, and peace.

Today we give thanks for signs of change—

for courage that speaks out against violence,

for compassion that reaches out in healing,

for communities that choose to stand together for justice.

As we gather in Your name, fill us with Your Spirit of hope.

Renew our commitment to build a world where women and men, girls and boys,

live free from fear and harm.

We offer You our worship and our lives, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

All: Amen.

Leader:

We gather in the presence of God — Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer — to remember, to give thanks, and to be renewed.

Today we celebrate The Butterfly Movement, inspired by the Mirabal Sisters, known as Las Mariposas — the Butterflies — whose courage and faith continue to inspire women around the world. Women's rights activists have observed 25 November as a day against gender-based violence since 1981. This date was selected to honour the Mirabal sisters, three political activists from the Dominican Republic who were brutally murdered in 1960 by order of the country's ruler, Rafael Trujillo. On 7 February 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations, officially designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and in doing so, invited governments, international organizations as well as NGOs to join together and organize activities designed to raise public awareness of the issue every year on that date.

Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa Mirabal stood against injustice with strength born of love and conviction. Their story reminds us that when we trust in God's Spirit, even fragile wings can stir great winds of change.

As butterflies emerge from darkness into light, so we, too, are called to transformation — from fear into faith, from silence into song, from despair into hope.

As we open this time of worship and reflection, may the symbol of the butterfly remind us of Christ's resurrection — the promise that life triumphs over death, and hope over fear.

Survivor Stories (Personal to you or use suggested stories attached)

Suggested hymn **StF 548 Blessed Assurance**

A lament

Holy and grieving God,

we come before you in sorrow and anger, our hearts heavy with the cries of women who suffer.

You formed each woman in your image— beloved, strong, and worthy of life and safety.

Yet too often their voices are silenced, their bodies broken,

their spirits crushed beneath the weight of violence.

God of justice, hear our lament.

For the women whose bruises are hidden, for those who are blamed for their pain,

for those who flee with their children into the night, for those who never make it home—

we mourn, we rage, we remember.

How long, O Lord, will the world turn away?

How long will fear and domination be called love?

How long will your daughters have to whisper their stories in the dark?

Prayer of Confession

God of compassion,

we confess that too often we have been silent when we should have spoken,

or distant when love called us near.

Forgive us for the times we have turned away from the pain of others.

Forgive us for the excuses that keep us from acting for justice.

Forgive us when we have failed to honour the dignity of every person You have created.

Renew us with Your grace.

Fill us with courage to do what is right, and love to heal what is broken.

In Jesus' name we pray

All: Amen.

Leader (Assurance of Pardon):

Hear the good news:

Christ came into the world to bring healing and wholeness.

In Him we are forgiven, restored, and made new.

All: Thanks be to God. Amen.

Readings Isaiah 43:1-3

Isaiah 61:1-3

Mark 5:25-34

SERMON

The following sermon can be read here

From Brokenness to Beauty: Giving Thanks for God's Healing Grace" written by Rev Leonora Wassell

Today we gather not in sorrow, but in thanksgiving.

We come together to celebrate life — the lives of women who have walked through the valley of pain, of fear, of abuse — and who, by God's grace, are standing here today.

We are not here to glorify the violence they endured, but to glorify the God who delivers, restores, and heals.

We are here to say: “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.” (Psalm 126:3)

There are times when survivors of violence feel invisible — unheard, unseen, unvalued.

But the Word of God tells us that He sees.

In Genesis 16, Hagar, a woman mistreated and cast away, cried out in the wilderness. God met her there and she named Him El Roi — “The God who sees me.”

God saw Hagar, and He sees every woman who has suffered in silence.

He sees the tears that no one else saw. He heard the prayers whispered in fear. And today, He reminds us: “You were never forgotten.”

Even in the darkest nights of despair, God was there — not approving the violence, but sustaining life, whispering hope, and preparing redemption.

Violence — whether physical, emotional, or spiritual — seeks to steal identity, dignity, and purpose.

But God is a restorer.

In Joel 2:25, He promises: “I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten.”

That means:

- Every broken piece can be made whole.
- Every stolen joy can be replaced with divine peace.
- Every wound can become a testimony of healing.

The enemy meant harm, but God turns pain into purpose.

You may have scars — but those scars are not signs of defeat; they are proof that you survived.

And not only survived — you are still standing, still praising, still hoping.

That is victory.

Today is a Thanksgiving Service.

You might ask: How can we give thanks after so much pain?

We give thanks not for the violence, but in spite of it. We thank God that violence did not have the final word.

We thank God for the counsellors, sisters, brothers, and communities that surrounded survivors with love.

We thank God for every small step of recovery — every night of rest, every tear of relief, every moment of courage to live again.

Gratitude does not erase the past, but it reclaims our power over it. When we give thanks, we are saying:

“My story will no longer be defined by what was done to me — it will be defined by what God is doing in me.”

God's healing work is not done in isolation.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He said to the people around, "Unbind him, and let him go."
(John 11:44)

Likewise, survivors need community — people who help unbind the chains of shame, stigma, and silence.

As a church and as a community, we are called to:

- Speak out against violence against women.
- Offer safe spaces for healing.
- Pray not only with words but with action.
- Raise sons and daughters who know that love never harms, never humiliates, never controls.

Thanksgiving must lead us to transformation — both personally and socially.

Because we are not truly thankful unless we use our freedom to help others find theirs.

Isaiah says God gives "a crown of beauty instead of ashes."

Ashes represent mourning, destruction, and loss. But God replaces them with beauty, dignity, and joy.

To every survivor here today, hear this truth:

- You are not what happened to you.
- You are who God says you are — beloved, strong, victorious, and whole.
- Your past does not define you; your faith does.
- The ashes of yesterday will become the soil where God plants new beginnings.

And as you rise, your story will give hope to others.

Your survival is not just for you — it is a light for other women still in darkness.

Let us give thanks today — not with mere words, but with hearts full of awe.

Thank God for survival.

Thank God for healing.

Thank God for courage to tell your story.

Thank God for love that rebuilds.

And thank God that violence and fear do not have the last word — Jesus does.

PRAYER:

Loving God,

We thank You for every woman gathered here today — for her courage, her endurance, her faith.
Thank You for lifting her out of the valley of pain and setting her feet on solid ground.

We thank You for the families, counsellors, and friends who have been instruments of Your healing.

Lord, continue to heal the hidden wounds. Restore what was taken.

Turn tears into testimonies, and fear into faith.

We pray for those still trapped.

Suggested Hymn StF 636 O love that wilt not let me go

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: Let us pray.

Gracious and faithful God, we give You thanks for Your steadfast love,

for Your mercy that never ends, and for the hope You plant deep within us.

We thank You for the courage of survivors—

for voices that have broken the silence,

for lives rebuilt with strength and grace.

We thank You for those who stand alongside them—

families, friends, communities, and advocates—

who embody Your compassion in word and action.

We give thanks for every step toward justice and healing:

for laws that protect,

for education that transforms,

for faith communities that offer safety and belonging.

Loving God, we thank You

for the Spirit's work of renewal in our world—

for signs of peace that overcome violence,

and for love that is stronger than fear.

For all this, and for the promise of Your kingdom of wholeness and equality,

we give You thanks and praise.

All: Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

Leader:

God of peace and justice, we bring before You the needs of Your world,
trusting in Your compassion and Your power to heal.

We pray for women and girls who live in fear, for those who have been silenced,
and for those still waiting for freedom and safety.

May Your love surround them, Your strength uphold them, and Your justice defend them.

(Pause)

We pray for men and boys—
that they may learn new ways of strength, founded in respect, kindness, and equality.
Shape our communities, O God, so that all may live in dignity and peace.

(Pause)

We pray for leaders and lawmakers, for those who serve in the courts, the police, and social care—
grant them wisdom, courage, and compassion.
May they act with integrity, seeking the good of all, especially the most vulnerable.

(Pause)

We pray for Your Church— that we may be a place of safety, truth, and grace.
Where there has been harm, bring repentance.
Where there is silence, bring courage. Where there is division, bring healing.

(Pause)

God of new beginnings, use us as instruments of Your peace.
Open our eyes to injustice, our ears to the cries of the hurting,
and our hearts to the movement of Your Spirit.
May Your kingdom come—
a world where all people live free from fear,
and where love reigns through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Prayer of Dedication / Offering

Leader: Let us pray.

Generous and loving God,

You have given us life, purpose, and hope in Jesus Christ.

Out of gratitude for all You have done, we offer to You our gifts—

our money, our time, our voices, and our hearts.

Use these offerings, Lord, to bring healing where there is pain,

light where there is darkness, and justice where there is oppression.

May what we give, and the way we live,

speak of Your love to the world.

Through Christ, who calls us to serve and to care,

we dedicate ourselves anew to Your work of peace.

All: Amen.

Suggested hymn StF 693 Beauty for brokenness

Sending and Benediction

Leader:

Go out into the world as people of hope.

Go with hearts made strong by love, and with voices ready to speak for justice.

May you be bearers of peace where there is conflict,

comfort where there is pain, and courage where there is fear.

And now, may the blessing of God— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—

be with you and remain with you,

and with all whom you love, today and always.

All: Amen.

Leader: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All: In the name of Christ. Amen.

A service written by Methodist Women in Britain.

Testimony 1

I Left to Save Us" – Mary's Story

I never imagined I'd be telling this story. For years, I lived in silence, convincing myself that things would get better, that he would change, that I could fix it. I thought if I just tried harder, loved more, stayed quiet, kept the children calm—maybe then the shouting would stop. Maybe then the fear would go away.

But it didn't.

At first, it was little things. He didn't like the way I dressed. He didn't want me seeing my friends. He'd check my phone, question where I'd been, accuse me of things I hadn't done. I told myself it was love. That he just cared too much.

Then came the yelling. The slamming doors. The threats. The nights I'd lie awake, heart pounding, waiting for the next explosion. And then, the day he raised his hand—and didn't stop.

I stayed. I stayed because I was scared. I stayed because I had two young children and nowhere to go. I stayed because I thought it was better for them to have both parents. I stayed because I didn't know there was another way.

But my children were watching. They were learning what love looked like. And one night, after a particularly terrifying outburst, I found my daughter hiding in her closet, clutching her little brother, whispering, "It's okay, I've got you." That moment shattered me.

I realized I wasn't protecting them. I was teaching them that fear was normal. That love meant pain. That silence was safety.

That night, I made a decision. I reached out to a local domestic abuse charity. I whispered into the phone, barely able to speak through the tears. And for the first time in years, someone listened. They believed me. They didn't ask why I stayed. They asked how they could help me leave.

With their support, I made a plan. I packed a small bag, gathered our documents, and waited for the right moment. When he left for work, I took my children and we ran.

We ended up in a women's refuge. It wasn't glamorous. It was small, and we shared space with other families. But it was safe. It was quiet. And for the first time in a long time, I could breathe.

The road to healing has been long. There were nights I cried myself to sleep, wondering if I'd made the right choice. There were days I felt like I was failing my children. But then I'd see them playing, laughing, sleeping peacefully—and I knew we were on the right path.

Today, we live in a small flat filled with light and laughter. My daughter no longer hides. My son has found his voice. And I've found mine too.

I'm sharing my story because I know there are others out there—mothers, fathers, partners—who feel trapped, afraid, ashamed. I want you to know: you are not alone. You are not weak. You are not to blame.

There is help. There is hope. And there is life after abuse.

I left to save us. And it was the bravest thing I've ever done.

Testimony 2

Jane's Story - What It Means to Be a Survivor of Domestic Abuse

Being a survivor of domestic abuse means learning how to live again — after everything that was meant to destroy you.

For a long time, I didn't even think of myself as a "survivor." I thought that word belonged to people who were stronger than me, braver than me — people who fought back. I didn't fight. I stayed. I made excuses. I kept hoping things would change. I thought if I loved him enough, he'd stop hurting me.

But surviving doesn't always look like running or screaming or fighting back. Sometimes surviving is staying alive one more day. Sometimes it's keeping quiet to protect yourself. Sometimes it's holding on to the smallest spark of hope — the whisper inside that says, "This isn't all there is. One day, I'll get out."

When I finally left, I thought that would be the end. I thought freedom meant healing. But I didn't realize that leaving was just the first step. The real work — the hard, messy, painful work — started after.

Healing meant facing everything I'd tried to bury: the fear, the shame, the self-blame. It meant learning that what happened to me was not my fault. It meant letting go of the guilt, the questions, the "what ifs." It meant forgiving myself for not leaving sooner.

Being a survivor means you carry pieces of the past with you — but you don't let them define you. Some days are still hard. Sometimes a sound or a smell brings it all back, and I feel small again. But now I know how to breathe through it. I remind myself: that was then, this is now.

It also means rebuilding trust — in myself, in others, in love. It means learning that love isn't supposed to hurt, that real love doesn't control or silence or break you. Love is gentle. Love is safe.

Being a survivor has taught me what strength really is. It's not about being unbreakable — it's about breaking and still finding a way to put yourself back together. It's about standing up again and again, even when your legs shake.

It means I can look at my reflection now and see more than the pain. I see a woman who made it out. A woman who found her voice again. A woman who's still healing — but free.

I'm not who I was before the abuse. I never will be. But I've learned that maybe that's okay. Because who I am now — this version of me — she knows her worth. She knows her power.

Being a survivor doesn't mean the story ends with escape.

It means the story continues — on your own terms, in your own time.

And for me, it means I finally know what it feels like to be alive.

Testimony 3

Faye's Story: Finding Freedom

I never thought I'd be the kind of woman who ended up in an abusive relationship. That's something I used to tell myself, back before it happened. I was independent, had a good job, friends, and a close family. When I met him, he was charming, attentive, and made me feel special. I thought I had found "the one."

It started so small. A few comments about what I wore. Questions about who I was texting. He'd say it was because he loved me and wanted to protect me. Then came the shouting, the insults, the blaming. He'd

accuse me of flirting if I talked to a co-worker or taking too long at the store. Every time I tried to stand up for myself, he'd twist it around until I ended up apologising.

The first time he hit me, I was in shock. He cried afterward, begged for forgiveness, said it would never happen again. I wanted to believe him — and for a while, I did. I didn't tell anyone. I made excuses for the bruises. I told myself he was just stressed, that I could fix things if I just loved him harder.

But it got worse. The violence became more frequent, and the fear never left. I lived every day trying not to upset him. I lost touch with friends. I stopped visiting my family. I stopped recognizing myself.

One night, after another argument that turned violent, I locked myself in the bathroom and looked in the mirror. My face was swollen, my lip was bleeding, and I remember thinking, If I don't leave, he's going to kill me. That was the moment something changed. I didn't feel brave — I felt desperate.

The next morning, I called a domestic violence helpline. The woman on the other end of the phone was calm and kind. She helped me find a shelter nearby. When he left for work that day, I packed a small bag, grabbed my documents, and left. I was terrified, but walking out that door was the best decision I've ever made.

The first few weeks were hard. I cried a lot. I felt guilty, confused, even lonely — it's strange how you can miss someone who hurt you so deeply. But the staff at the shelter were incredible. They helped me get counselling, apply for legal protection, and rebuild my life step by step.

It's been almost four years now. I have my own flat, a steady job, and a small circle of friends who know my story. I still have moments when the past catches up to me, but I don't live in fear anymore. I'm free.

If anyone reading this is living through what I went through, I want you to know: you are not crazy, and it's not your fault. There are people who will believe you, help you, and stand beside you. You deserve to be safe. You deserve peace. You deserve to live.

Testimony 4 Amina's Story

My name is Amina, and I grew up in Birmingham.

I was born here — went to a regular primary school, had British friends, watched EastEnders with my mum. I thought I was just like everyone else.

When I was eight, my parents told me we were going on holiday — to visit family back home in Somalia. I was so excited. It was my first time on a plane. I remember the heat, the smell of the food, everyone laughing and hugging. I felt loved.

Then one morning, my mum said we were going to a celebration. She dressed me in a new yellow dress. I remember thinking, this must be something special.

When we arrived, it wasn't a celebration. There were women waiting in a small room. They said they were going to make me "clean," make me "a woman."

That was the day it happened.

That was the day I lost something I can never get back.

When we came back to the UK, no one talked about it. My mum told me, don't ever tell anyone what happened — they won't understand our culture.

So I stayed quiet. For years.

But I knew I wasn't the same. I had pain, infections, nightmares. And I felt ashamed — even though I didn't know why.

When I was thirteen, a nurse came to my school to talk about FGM.

She explained what it was, that it's illegal in Britain, that it causes lifelong harm.

I just sat there, frozen.

For the first time, I realised what had been done to me — and that it wasn't my fault.

A year later, I told my teacher. She helped me get support. I went to a clinic in London that helps girls like me. I met doctors who treated me gently. I met other survivors. And for the first time, I felt like I could breathe again.

Now, I work with a charity that supports girls at risk of FGM.

I go into schools, like this one, and tell them my story. Sometimes people say I shouldn't — that I'm disrespecting my culture. But I tell them: I'm not disrespecting my culture. I'm protecting our daughters.

FGM isn't tradition. It's harm.

And silence keeps it alive.

So if you're here today, and you're scared, or if you think someone you know might be at risk — please, speak to someone. A teacher. A nurse. A friend. There are people who will listen. There are people who can help.

My name is Amina.

I'm a survivor of FGM.

And I'm using my voice — because no girl should ever lose hers.