

SCRIPT for Worship Leaders¹

“With All Due Respect”

A Memorial Service for Those Buried at Potter’s Field

March 23, 2005

James Chapel

Designed by members of Picture the Homeless
with Amy Gopp, The Poverty Initiative at Union Theological Seminary

Chapel/Space Set Up: People will gather in the chapel after having to step over the symbolic body of someone who could have been found and buried at Potter’s Field. The “body” made of garbage bags, cardboard boxes, old blankets, and heaps of clothes, all provided by PTH members, will be laid at the entrance of the chapel, blocking the doors so that all entering are confronted by the image and have to step over it, engage with it, or otherwise notice it.

The chairs should be set up in a circle around the chapel so that everyone gathering can see one another, leaving one section in the front – facing the organ – with no chairs. There should be standing microphones set up around the circle for all the worship leaders to use. There will be quite a number of worship leaders so those not using the standing microphones should get a lapel mic. In the middle of the space will be an altar set up with different size pillars and benches draped in cloths – preferably purple symbolizing Lent and death – with many candles all over them for people to light later in the ritual. If there is not enough space on this altar for all those gathered to light a candle, perhaps smaller altars – 2 or 3 – could be set up around the circle where people could also light a candle. The service will begin, however, in complete darkness. Along with the candles should be baskets with papers and pens/pencils/markers. Also around the altar will be pictures of those we know who have died and been interred at Potter’s Field (PTH will supply these).

In the front section of the chapel, where no chairs are set up, will be three sheets/big pieces of paper hanging, pulled tight enough that people can pin something on them. The words “We Are There” will be faintly written on the sheets with the names “John”, “Jane”, “Baby” making up the letters of “We” “Are” and “There”. As the congregation responds to the eulogy, they will be invited to come to the sheets and pin a name, prayer, blessing, hope, etc. on the sheets. When all are posted, we will see the words “We Are There.”

¹ All prayers and spoken parts written by members of Picture the Homeless.

Opening Music “Were You There?”

Rogers

(Rogers will sing this as a solo, standing behind the white sheets so as not to be seen. Only his voice will be heard. This will begin the service after the prelude.)

Were you there when they crucified my Lord ?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord ?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my Lord ?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree ?
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree ?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree ?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side ?
Were you there when they pierced him in the side ?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they pierced him in the side ?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb ?
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb ?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb ?

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Dawn Quinones

“Good afternoon and welcome to our memorial service for deceased homeless and poor New Yorkers.

Just because we’re poor doesn’t mean that we should be forgotten. But so many of us have been forgotten, laid to rest as anonymous souls in a common plot with 150 other wooden boxes labeled “John” or “Jane Doe.”

Today we call upon the Lord to hear our cries and the cries of the 800,000 forgotten people buried in Potter’s Field on Hart Island.

Let us pray: Creator God, we come to you in prayer asking for your presence among us as we honor our sisters and brothers and children. Look over all those buried in Potter’s Field, their families and friends, and those at risk of being buried there someday. They all make up our family of saints – both living and dead – and we thank you for their presence with us today. May this time of acknowledgement of their lives honor them, all of us gathered, and You. We ask this in the name of the God who lifts us up. AMEN!”

William: *Wall Street,*
Dawn: *Multinational Corporations,*
Bruce: *Won't refuse our blood money.*

Amy: "After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners.

Torrey: *In 1868 New York City spent \$75,000 to purchase Hart Island.*

Rogers: *This would become the final resting place for the nameless, indigent, and homeless poor.*

Amy: "For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Mike: *That is why it is called the Field of Blood to this day.*

Amy: "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.'"

Jean: *What's the price paid for the dignity of the dead?*

Together: *What's the price paid for the dignity of the living poor?*

Scripture Luke 16

Charles Heck

Silent Meditation

Community

Song "Were You There?"

Community

(Including the verse we wrote and added, "**Are you there when they bury all our poor**" which will need to be printed in the bulletin for all to see)

Eulogy

Jean Rice

"The late Lewis Haggins, co-founder of Picture the Homeless, departed from us last year to his eternal rest.. He left our organization, Picture the Homeless, as a legacy steeped in his personal quest for justice—for the homeless, downtrodden, the most sorely oppressed of our society. Please note that our mission statement is a living document, central to the legacy of Lewis Haggins, our co-founder. His legacy is immortalized in the work we continue in his name. He lived the words

of Pope Leo who said that it would be a great mistake to take up the notion that one class of God's children is naturally hostile to another class of the same human family. After all, one creator made us all sisters and brothers. The church is the interpreter and guardian drawing the rich and the poor together, reminding each of its duties to the other and essentially of the obligations of justice.

Children, remain joined in Christ then when he comes, we can be bold we will not be ashamed to meet him when he comes. We honor Louis and we honor God:

1. when we oppose quality of life laws that criminalize the poor
2. when we work to change those laws and policies
3. when we educate homeless people about their rights
4. when we help to organize homeless to defend their rights
5. when we educate the public about causes of homelessness
6. when we work to change the stereotypes about homeless people
7. when we ally ourselves with people who struggle for justice and remind us of our equality in the eyes of our common creator.

INDEED, WE HONOR ALL OUR DEAD, NAMED AND UNNAMED, AS WE GATHER TOGETHER IN UNITY AND IN PRAYER THAT THEY REST IN THE ETERNAL PEACE OF OUR GOD AND CREATOR. THANK YOU."

(Jean lights the first candle on the altar, in honor of Lewis, and then writes his name on a piece of paper that he places on one of the "John Does" written on the sheets in the back.)

Congregational Response

Community

(Rogers then explains and invites the congregation to do the same, discussing the importance of naming the unnamed. Rogers will also invite them to light a candle and write a name of someone they may know or suspect is buried at Potter's Field or someone who has died in their own life, regardless of where they are buried. Persons could also write prayers, hopes, or blessings on the papers to place on the sheets. He then follows Jean by modeling for the

congregation the ritual action. These papers will then be placed on the names on the sheets/papers eventually spelling out the words, "We Are There.")

Special Music

Gospel Choir

Prayer of Response and Thanksgiving

William Burnett

"Merciful Father, today we celebrate the lives of our forgotten sisters and brothers in exile who have gone before us to our eternal home. You have not forgotten them. We entrust them to your eternal embrace.

But you, Father, are God of the dead – and God of the living. We lay bold claim, today, to your promise of faithful care for the daughters and sons of your Kingdom. You are God who hears the cry of the poor. So we place our hope in you.

You call us, today, to be instruments of your Kingdom. Your Son said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (*Luke 12:49*). Make of us worthy kindling for your fire of love and of justice.

We give you thanks, eternal Father, through your Son Jesus Christ who, from Calvary's hill, lifts us up, in unity with the Holy Spirit who comforts us and guides our lives.

Amen."

Benediction/Commissioning

William Burnett

"Sisters and brothers, today's celebration is complete; but our search and work for justice continues. Go out and spread the hope and joy of the Lord. And those who could said, **Amen!**"

Supplies to get:

- Post-it notes in one bright color (not the typical pale yellow)
- 3 white sheets
- baskets full of the post-it notes and pens, pencils, and markers
- garbage bags, blankets, cardboard boxes, clothes, to make a “dead body”
- lots of candles
- pictures of family and friends buried at Potter’s Field
- altar cloths (purple if possible for the Lenten theme)
- Memorial service cards, passed out to people on their way in and/or out – they will read,

“Potter’s Field on Hart Island was established 137 years ago. We’ve buried 800,000 persons – mostly poor and homeless New Yorkers – on Potter’s Field. Finally, we come together to honor these forgotten souls. Let’s not wait another 137 years to do the same.

800,000

Thank you for joining us today. We may be poor, but that does not mean we should be forgotten.”

[Picture the Homeless logo at bottom of card]