Thank you for remembering Embrace in your special Harvest celebrations!

These flexible, pick and mix Worship resources have been designed to add inspiring depth and colour to a service where your church is praying and giving to sow seeds of change with us. You can use them on their own, or alongside any other activity such as a food collection for local projects. They also provide you with lots to share about Embrace’s work at a Harvest supper. (See page 3 of these resources, or refer back to our Leader’s guide if you need a more detailed explanation.)

If you haven’t got everything you need yet to sow seeds of change with us, call 01494 897950 or visit embraceme.org/harvest

Harvest is a special time full of opportunities to celebrate God’s good gifts and share them with others, just as God intended. So we’re praying a special blessing on you and your church to enjoy an inspiring and challenging time together as you plan your celebrations, hold your special service, gather round your supper table, or mark Harvest in any other way.

Suggested Bible readings:
The main passages referenced in these resources are:

- **2 Corinthians 9** (the lead inspiration for our seeds of change theme).

- **Psalm 65** (a creation themed Psalm which is the source for the ‘crown of the year’ description of Harvest).

But the following additional Old Testament and Gospel readings also connect strongly with our focus:

- **Genesis 41:46-49, 53-57** (describing Joseph’s wisdom in food distribution in Egypt).

- **Matthew 6:1-14** (including The Lord’s Prayer, and its petition for ‘our daily bread’).
Growing new futures

Share this story at your Harvest service or supper – or include it in your church magazine or email circular. Go to embraceme.org/harvest to find a PowerPoint with photos of the people featured.

For families living in rural Egypt, it can be difficult to flourish today, let alone grow the future they long for. But Embrace’s partners are helping to change that. And you can too.

When you think of Egypt, what do you picture? Perhaps it’s the bustling city of Cairo, ancient sites such as the pyramids, or even a sunny holiday resort...

But did you know that almost two out of three people in Egypt live in rural areas? And that in many of these places, as many as two out of three again live in poverty? Struggling to make ends meet and feed their families.

The main way to make a living in rural Egypt is farming. But many people don’t have their own land to sow and reap crops on. Instead, they are often dependant on casual work they can – or can’t – get from larger land-owners. Things can quickly get desperate when there isn’t much work, or if a key breadwinner is lost to illness, injury or death.

This paints something of a desert picture... But it’s remarkable what even the smallest seeds of change can grow here when they’re put into the right hands.

Embrace partners with three Christian organisations providing microloans to enterprising individuals in particular need here. This seed money is packed with potential. It empowers them to set their talents free to plant brand new small businesses. And once these start to grow, life-giving new futures begin to grow too. Futures where families are fed and people begin to lift themselves out of poverty.

Futures like Hana’s...

Hana was struggling to make ends meet because her husband was too ill to work. But with a microloan of just £37 from Embrace’s partner, Think and Do, she began a bread-making business. The initial seed money helped her buy fuel for her stove, and wheat and corn – which she bought direct from the farmer to increase her profits. Using her mother’s traditional recipes and techniques, she’s now making enough money to expand into creating sweets for festivals, and even to pay a couple of her neighbours too – in bread!

Hana’s story is one among many. Just for starters, Embrace’s partner BLESS* has helped:

- Kaarima to establish a shop so she can afford her son’s cancer treatment.
- Ibrahim to launch a business making wooden lintels for doorways so he can keep providing for his family despite his injury.
- Marifah to venture into hairdressing, and now also into renting out wedding dresses to local brides. She has been so successful she can keep her son in school and send her daughter to university! Something that seemed impossible when she was first widowed...

The stories of new types of harvest in Egypt go on and on. But there are many more people who still need help to get started. What could your church’s generosity with prayers and gifts sow into Egypt? What seeds are you holding that you could share to help grow more new futures?

*BLESS stands for the Coptic Orthodox Church Bishopric of Public Ecumenical and Social Services.

Thank you for sowing seeds of change with us! 2
Sow seeds of change with us: Worship resources

Sowing your seeds of change into Egypt

This is the main way we’d love everyone to pray, and give with us if they can, this Harvest. So please join in to be part of sending a huge encouragement to our partners in Egypt.

You will need a set of the following for every person present: a Seed prayer card (go to embraceme.org/harvest to download sheets of four); a pen; a Seed packet and a Gift Aid envelope (available to order by calling 01494 897950 or at embraceme.org/harvest).

• Give every person or family a pen, a Seed prayer card, a Gift Aid envelope and a Seed packet.

• Encourage them all to write their own prayer for Hana, Egypt or Embrace’s partners on their Seed prayer card.

• Ask them to put their prayer in their Seed packet. And that anyone who can also uses the Gift Aid envelope to include practical seeds of money alongside their prayerful one.

• Explain that Embrace will take all the Seed prayer cards received to Egypt and give them to our partner Anafora, on behalf of everyone we work with in Egypt. This is the perfect place because it is a retreat and training centre that’s part of the Coptic Orthodox church whose team follow a daily rhythm of prayer, as well as running projects to serve those in need. Your seeds of prayer will therefore sow both potential-packed prayers to God, and a powerful message of encouragement to Christians in the Middle East as they carry out their important work. (You might also want to tell people they will be able to see photos of Anafora receiving their prayers – see the Leader’s guide for more details.)

• Say all the seeds of money received will be sown into supporting Embrace’s partners’ work in Egypt. This practical support is vitally important for helping our partners continue enabling more people like Hana to grow new, life-giving futures.

• (See our Leader’s guide for more information on the practicalities of returning your seeds of change to us.)

Creative offering ideas: for collecting up your seeds of change

Use one or more of these interactive ideas to make sowing your seeds of change even more special:

• Use a large plant pot to collect all your seed packets.

• Encourage one or two young volunteers to lay out all your seed packets in rows – perhaps next to your local food collection – to mirror planting seeds in soil.

• Print off, or project, a large image of Embrace’s logo, with its open hands … then invite everyone to come up and fill these hands with their seed packets, till they are overflowing with seeds to pass on to our partners in Egypt.

Thank you for sowing seeds of change with us!
All-age talk

You will need: a loaf of bread; a shopping bag; a bag of flour; a picture of a wheat field (or some sheaves if you have any!); a packet of seeds; images from our Growing new futures PowerPoint (optional, see embraceme.org/harvest); an example set of a seeds of change: Seed packet, Seed prayer card and Gift Aid envelope.

• Take the loaf of bread out of the shopping bag, and ask where it comes from.

• Use the answers you get – and the shopping bag, flour, field picture, and seeds – to help you trace the bread’s journey back through shop, food distribution, packing, manufacture, harvesting and growing … all the way to seed.

• Hold up a seed. Talk about how much can grow from something so tiny.

• Ask where seeds come from. Draw out both ‘God’ and ‘previous crops’ as correct answers.

• Explain that:
  o Celebrating Harvest is even more important if we aren’t involved with growing our own food. It helps us remember where all good gifts come from.
  o Psalm 65 reminds us: however hard working the farmer – or the person earning the money to buy food – it’s God who made and sustains everything. Including crops – and us!
  o Harvest is also a picture of how God designed the world – and us – to work. A big harvest is not often held onto, or eaten, by just one person! Instead it provides food for lots of people. And more seed to sow and grow future harvests.
  o The Bible uses this picture to help us understand everything we receive is designed to work like this too. It encourages us to be generous with sharing whatever types of harvest we are holding – as well as wholeheartedly enjoying them ourselves.

• Read, or summarise, 2 Corinthians 9:6-12. Explain that Paul was writing to Christians in Corinth, Greece, asking them to give to help some Macedonians who didn’t have enough.

• Underline that giving and sowing are the unavoidable, happy results of hearts that have grown in thanks to God and love for Him and other people! Just as wheat produces wheat seed, so hearts thankful to a generous God produce seeds of happy generosity.

• Qualify that this doesn’t mean we can always afford to give lots away, or that it’s never hard to share. But it does mean the more we grow the more we will want to give. And we can always be generous with our prayers for other people and places.

• Explain that you’re all going to do a bit of happy gathering, sharing and sowing to celebrate Harvest today!

• If you are holding a food collection for a local organisation, collect everyone’s contributions, or refer to them, now. Explain they represent some of the harvests you are holding, and choosing to share. (Tell everyone about the local cause(s) you are supporting.)

• Say this Harvest you are going to respond to a special message you’ve received. It’s a bit like Paul’s letter. But it’s not about people in Macedonia. Instead it’s from Embrace the Middle East, and it’s about people in Egypt.

• Ask:
  o if anyone knows where Egypt is
  o whether anyone in your church has been there
  o what people can remember about it from the Bible and history books.

(If you have time, you might like to mention the account in Genesis 41:46-49 and 53-57 which describes how Joseph stewarded Egypt’s harvests to ensure there was enough for everyone.)

• Read or paraphrase the story: ‘Growing new futures’ (see page 2) illustrating it with pictures from the PowerPoint if you want to. (If you have time, you might like to add in some extra information about Egypt, Nayrouz and the Coptic Orthodox Church too – see page 7.)

• Hold up an example Seed packet, Seed prayer card and Gift Aid envelope and lead people through the Sowing your seeds of change into Egypt instructions on page 3. Then use one or more of our Creative offering ideas there to gather up and display your Seed packets.

• You may want to move on in your service now. But you could also hold up the loaf of bread again. If you do, say it’s wonderful that Hana’s bread-making business started with prayerful and practical seeds of change given in the past … and exciting to imagine what might grow next from the seeds you have just sown together!

Sow seeds of change with us: Worship resources

Thank you for sowing seeds of change with us!
Written prayers

A blessing to pray over your collected Seed packets

Generous and loving God, it is You who has given us every good gift we harvest and hold. So now we joyfully offer back to You these seeds of prayer and money, sown by happy-to-give-hearts grown abundant with thanks and love. We ask You to bless them and use them to change the lives of more people like Hana living in rural Egypt today. By Your mercy and power, may these seeds of change grow many more new harvests of hopeful and life-giving futures as we sow them with Embrace, its partners in Egypt, and You.

All-age thanksgiving prayer

This prayer is designed for all ages to pray together, and would work particularly well led by children. You might want to practise the shouting part first!

God of all growth I can and can’t see, from fields of wheat and apples on trees to a getting-more-thankful heart inside of me, I take a deep breath, and with all of my strength, shout: THANK YOU FOR THE FOOD I EAT!

Thank You for the harvests You give us to share, thank You when we do, there’s enough for everywhere! I’ll never understand quite how You squeeze such huge tasty crops into tiny little seeds. But help me learn the power of whatever I sow; my prayers and gifts can help others’ futures grow.

God of all good gifts I can and can’t see, from tall fields of crops and bread-buying money to a getting-more-generous heart inside of me, I take a deep breath, and with all of my strength, shout: HELP ME SHARE ALL I RECEIVE!

A Coptic sowing prayer

The Coptic Orthodox Church has special liturgy to bless each time of sowing. Here is one of their prayers. It was shared with us by our partner, Anafora, situated near Cairo in Egypt, and echoes some of Psalm 65’s language. Because this text has been taken directly from a Coptic Orthodox prayer book, we have retained the word ‘Priest’. (See page 7 for more information about the Coptic Church.)

Priest: Graciously accord, O Lord, to bless the seeds, the herbs, and the plants of the field, this year.

All: Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.

Priest: Raise them up to their measure according to Your grace. Give joy to the face of the earth. May its furrows be abundantly watered and its fruits be plentiful. Prepare it for sowing and harvesting. Manage our lives as deemed fit. Bless the crown of the year with Your goodness for the sake of the poor of Your people, the widow, the orphan, the traveller, the stranger, and for the sake of us all who entreat You and seek Your holy name. For the eyes of everyone wait upon You, for You give them their food in due season. Deal with us according to Your goodness, O You who give food to all flesh. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness, that we too, having sufficiency in everything always, may abound in every good deed.

All: Lord have mercy.
Prayers of intercession

These prayers include a section focused around a local food collection, to which you can add more details. (Simply omit the section in purple if you aren’t focusing on a local organisation as well as Embrace.)

Leader: Generous and loving God, we thank You again for all Your wonderful gifts to us – in the beauty and richness of creation to inspire and sustain us; through the extraordinary sacrifice of Your Son to forgive and free us; and in the ever-present power of Your Spirit to change us and grow us. Make us more like You, we pray. Till the complacent soil of our hearts and make us ready for truly generous living and giving.

All: Generous and loving God, sow seeds of change in us.

Leader: Generous and loving God, we thank You again for all the wonderful resources You have given us to enjoy and pass on. Help us to have a loose grip on every harvest we find ourselves holding, ready to let it turn into seed to be shared as You lead. And sown again, and again, to bring growth for others beyond ourselves.

All: Generous and loving God, help us sow seeds of change.

Leader: Generous and loving God, thank You for all the good gifts we have collected to share with [insert details of who your local food collection is going to]. Bless all who receive them. [Insert any additional things you want to pray for in relation to the local charity you are supporting.] Keep challenging us, and others in our community and the UK, that where we have plenty, it has been given so we can freely share till everyone has enough.

All: Generous and loving God, use these good gifts to bless our community.

Leader: Generous and loving God, thank You for all the fruitful work carried out by Embrace and their dedicated partners on the ground in Egypt, and across the Middle East. Today we especially remember before You Think and Do, Episcocare and BLESS, asking You to sustain them and their work with every good thing. Thank you for all the seeds of change they are putting into the hands of people like Hana. We lift to You every family struggling to make ends meet; every enterprising individual receiving a microloan; and every brand new small business that’s starting here. We ask You to enable more and more people to flourish as Your generous gifts are shared with those who most need them.

All: Generous and loving God, grow more futures in rural Egypt.

Leader: Generous and loving God, thank You for the nation of Egypt, and all its precious people. Thank You too for the Coptic Orthodox Church and for every Christian from every background that lives, and serves You, in this nation. We remember before You the large numbers of people of all faiths living in poverty here, and the further strain that both water shortages and political upheaval have placed on this nation recently. At this time which is both the crown of the year for us, and the start of a New Year for our Coptic brothers and sisters, we ask You to bless Egypt’s harvests in the year ahead.

All: Generous and loving God, shine the light of Your face upon Egypt, and may its people receive plenty and peace in Jesus’ life-giving name, Amen.

A Harvest grace

You can use this prayer at a Harvest Supper, or any other community meal you might be holding as part of your Harvest celebrations. It is also available on our seeds of change table mat, available to print off at embraceme.org/harvest

Generous and loving Father, thank You for our daily bread, and our so much more… for fields grown high with crops, branches bowed low with fruit, cupboards stocked with provisions, and this table, crowded with friends. Bless our food, and our time together as we celebrate Harvest with You. But above all, may Your gifts to us overflow up, over and out in joyful, free-flowing generosity to those beyond our table – in our own community, in rural Egypt, and across the Middle East. For we know we have received much to give much away, so help us sow seeds of change with Embrace – by the power of Your grace, Amen.
Growing a heart for Egypt, its Christians and those they serve

Use this information to:
• inspire a talk at your Harvest supper
• contribute extra depth to our story: ‘Growing new futures’ or ‘All-age talk’ at your service
• inform more extended or ongoing prayer.

Egypt:
• 96 million people live in Egypt – compared to 66 million in the UK.
• Almost all of them live on just a small fraction of the country’s land, close to the River Nile.
• Egypt is officially a middle income country but around one in three people live in poverty.
• More than half the population rely on farming to earn a living. But most of them don’t own land so seek casual work on larger farms.
• As many as two-thirds of people in rural Egypt struggle to make ends meet for their families.
• For any who are particularly vulnerable, perhaps because a key bread winner is ill, injured or lost, things can quickly become desperate. And there is little access to government help.
• Water shortages and political upheaval have both increased the pressure on Egypt recently.

Embrace’s partners in Egypt
• Embrace has 12 Christian partners working with all faiths and none in Egypt to serve those in need.
• They serve faithfully to help lift people out of poverty, welcome and support refugees, provide essential healthcare services, empower and train women and integrate people living with disabilities into mainstream society.
• This Harvest, we are focusing on three partners – Think and Do, Episcocare and BLESS – who provide microloans to vulnerable but enterprising individuals so they can establish small businesses to support their families. (Find out more on page 2.)

Christians in Egypt
• Around 10 million Christians live in Egypt – representing 80% of Christians in the Middle East.
• By far the largest denomination here is the Coptic Orthodox Church. This has its own Pope (currently Tawadros II) and traces its roots right back to the apostle Mark.
• The Bible was translated into the Coptic language as early as the second century.
• Although Christians do face pressure and tension in some areas of Egypt today, they also remain active and influential members of society. Many make an

El-Nayrouz (Coptic New Year)
• The Coptic Church’s calendar is different. They start celebrating their New Year – the Feast of El-Nayrouz – on 11 or 12 September and continue for two weeks. So our Harvest time is a great time of year to be praying for Egyptian Christians.
• Like Harvest, Nayrouz is a time of celebration and has a joyful, thankful tone. Key prayers used repeat a line inspired by Psalm 65, also used in their sowing prayer (see page 5) which asks God to ‘Bless the crown of the year’.
• The Coptic Church adopted their calendar in 283 AD during a particularly severe time of persecution from the Roman Empire as the ‘Calendar of the Martyrs’.
• Nayrouz has a strong focus on honouring those who have died for their faith. To link it back to our central focus this Harvest, there is a resonance here with Jesus’ words in John 12:24 about seed falling to the ground. As Christians, it is our whole lives – not just our prayer and resources – that we sow into God’s kingdom.
• Visit coptichymnsinenglish.com/copticnewyear to listen to some English translations of Nayrouz hymns. You’ll find the lines about blessing the ‘crown of the year’ in the ‘Doxology’ and ‘Psalm Response’.

About harvests in Egypt
• Egypt has a very different climate to the UK – with 300 days of sun a year! So it has several cycles of planting and harvest. This means the ‘Coptic sowing prayer’ (see page 5) would be said multiple times in a year. And that there is no direct equivalent to an annual Harvest Festival in Egypt.
• Some of Egypt’s main crops are the same as the UK’s, such as wheat, sugar beet and beans. But more exotic crops such as cotton, rice and sugar cane can also do well here.