Dear Host,

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a guide for the audience who will soon be experiencing ***“Paul in Chains: Philippians”.*** Here are just a few points I ask you to consider as you welcome the congregation, introduce the presentation and bring the event to a close.

**Welcoming:**

1. Please ask people to move near the front and to sit closely together.

Why?

We are trying to recreate some of the experience of the people who were the very first ones in the city of Philippi to hear these words from Paul. Imagine that Epaphroditus returns home from Rome with Paul’s letter in hand. News quickly spreads among the believers and they gather the next Sunday eager to hear what the Apostle has written. They are likely crowded closely together to catch every word.

1. Please ask people to close their Bibles and put them away.

Why?

The first hearers had no copies of the text to read for themselves, indeed most were probably illiterate anyway. They had never seen or heard these words before. Those who remembered Paul from the time he had spent among them many years before, listened intently and probably recognized the cadence of his voice and could envision Paul speaking to them in person. They engaged their imaginations to picture Paul standing before them and teaching them as he used to do.

1. Please ask people to put their cell phones away and do not record video or take pictures.

Why?

I want people to engage with the personality and message of Paul directly. I want their full attention, their eyes and their ears. And hopefully their hearts, minds and spirits as well.

Please help me communicate that this is not a “performance” but it is meant to be an “experience”. I pray that the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul will fill those who listen deeply to him.

1. Ask people to pretend that they are part of a delegation of believers that has been sent to the Roman prison where Paul is being held.

Why?

This is simply a way to imagine ourselves being involved in Paul’s life as it was and to picture him in his circumstances as he wrote his prison epistles. Paul did not actually “write” his letters. He dictated them to a friend who recorded his words on parchment. In this way Paul could be free to speak from his heart as the Spirit provided guidance to his thoughts and as he perhaps actually imagined himself speaking directly to his hearers as he pictured them in his mind’s eye. He was fully engaging with his brothers and sisters whom he loved affectionately.

1. Invite the person who is playing the role of the Prison Warden to read the introduction provided.

(If you choose not to have a Prison Warden, you may do this part yourself. Or you may simply read the bullet points from the script which provide some of the back story for Paul’s story and helps to set the scene for Paul’s entrance into your venue.)

**Closing:**

I do not encourage applause as Paul exits the venue at the close of the presentation, but it often happens. In some church traditions, applause happens and in other traditions applause seems awkward and perhaps irreverent due to the sacred worship space. As the host I do not ask you to squelch applause if it is spontaneously happening. But I do ask that you do not initiate it or encourage it either. If there is applause I will assume that people are applauding the Lord and applauding Saint Paul, not Duffy. If there is applause, let it run its course.

I ask that you soon guide the people into a time of appreciation for Paul, thanksgiving to God, and reflection on the message of the letter. Do this in whatever manner suits the culture and tradition of your congregation. I have supplied a short reflection form which you may choose to make copies of and hand out to the people.

If there is congregational singing you might consider closing with “Knowing You, Jesus (All I Once Held Dear)” by Graham Kendrick or some other suitable hymn or song.

While you lead the people in expressing themselves to the Lord and/or to one another, I will be changing out of costume. It is not necessary to invite me back into the venue after I have changed. But if it is fitting in your setting to do so, I will gladly come back in. I can even answer questions about the presentation if that is appropriate. Otherwise and preferably, I will happily make myself available at the close of your worship service/program, if people should like to make comments to me personally.

Thank you again, for giving me this opportunity to minister God’s love to your people.

Duffy Roberts

PS On the next page is a sample introduction if you need it.

A sample of an introduction which the host may adapt and use (when there is no one portraying the prison warden):

The Bible is a powerful and wonderful deposit of God’s truth; it is a gift to us to hear and mark and study and obey. We often follow its reading by listening to a sermon by someone who has studied, prayed, and worked over the text to help us understand and obey it in our situation. The truth of the text is expounded or exposed in the preaching, and this is a good way to sit under the authority of the Bible.

But when we read it or hear it in a sermon, it no longer has quite the freshness of either the first time *we* heard it, nor the very first time it was ever heard by the original hearers.

This morning we are seeking to recreate this fresh word here in this place at this time. Our hope today is that you will connect personally and emotionally with the man who first spoke these words. Our hope is that he will engage you as his own personal friends and encourage you. That you will be moved to love him and imitate him. That you will enter into his faith and understand his struggles so that you can persevere and do the same when your season of suffering is upon you.

Close your eyes and think with me for just a moment what it may have been like to hear these words for the first time. Someone has told you that a letter has come from the man who led you to Christ by his preaching and teaching. Everyone is gathering at Lydia’s house to hear it. You see others streaming toward her house, they’ve heard the news too. And now you are gathered, eager, wondering what the man that led you to faith will have to say….then the buzz of conversation ceases as the leader stands to read the letter, written in prison by Paul as he was in chains.

But now let’s imagine that Paul did not live two thousand years ago. Let’s imagine that he is alive today. He has been traveling and planting churches in a world that has known nothing of Jesus Christ until the apostle arrived in each town and proclaimed the Good News. His journeys eventually brought him here to [your town] about 10 years ago. He preached the gospel here to this church—[your church]—which was born a mere decade ago. Some of you still remember those days. You remember Paul. The church has grown since then and many of you never met Paul personally, but oh, the stories the old timers have told you about him.

And you have all heard updates now and then of where Paul is and how he is doing. You learn that he has been arrested and he is imprisoned in faraway Rome. Out of concern and love for him you send one of your church members to go and see Paul and to assist him with any needs. That church member has returned and guess what? Paul has been permitted to make an in-person visitation to your church this morning. He will be brought up out of his dank, dark dungeon and allowed to speak directly to us, live and in person. This is Paul in chains.