

# A SERVICE OF SHADOWS

*by Norman H. Wiegel*



**CHRISTIAN**PUBLISHERS

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# **A SERVICE OF SHADOWS**

**By Norman H. Wiegel**

**CAST**

**4 Readers**

*(Only Reader 4 reads the words of Jesus)*

**Peter**

**John**

**James**

**Judas**

**Pilate**

**2 Guards**

**2 Women**

*NOTE: Additional Disciples or Crowd Members can be added;  
also doubling up is possible.*

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

**Lighting** — Seven light cues, as indicated in the script, seem to work best. Dim the lights in your sanctuary or hall one-seventh on each cue until, after the seventh cue, the room is completely dark except for the Christ Candle. (If your lighting system does not operate on dimmers, turn off one-seventh of the lights on each cue.) The candle is carried out leaving total darkness during the tolling of the thirty-three bells.

After the candle is carried back in and placed on an altar, some additional lights may be brought up to allow the congregation to leave in safety.

**Costumes** — The Readers: males in dark suits, white shirts and dark ties; females in dark suits (dresses) with white blouses. All other characters: dark pants or skirts and white shirts or blouses with the following additions — Guards: button shirts and add dark ties; Peter, James, John: add a pastel sleeveless artist-type smock; Judas: add a contrasting dark colored smock; Pilate: button shirt and add a dark tie and a purple robe; Women: add a shawl.

**Props** — A Christ candle — a large candle found at religious supply stores; a “Last Supper” table; chairs for as many Disciples as you decide to have; two waist-high candle holders or small tables; a six- to seven-foot cross with a shelf for the Christ candle.

**Blocking (movement)** — The stage setting and movement is very simple. As can be seen from the diagram, the stage or altar is divided into four general areas with the action moving toward the audience/congregation as the service proceeds toward its conclusion.

Specific blocking instructions involving the Christ candle are as follows:

1. **The Last Supper** (page 1, line 28) Characters take their places around the large table, and one of them places the candle in the center of the table.
2. **The Agony in the Garden** (page 2, line 35) John moves the candle to the first small table.

3. **The Trial** (page 5, line 19) A guard moves the candle to the second small table.
4. **The Crucifixion** (page 6, line 8) A guard places the candle on the cross's shelf.

Since the Christ candle represents the body of Christ, the participants face the candle and react to it as if it were Jesus.

The Readers, who read most of the lines of the various characters including Jesus, can stand behind them or off to the sides.

If your worship area allows for no easy entrances and exits for the participants, all simply enter together at the beginning and take seats around the acting perimeter. As new characters enter the service, they stand, walk forward and take their places; conversely, as an actor finishes a scene he or she takes a seat on the perimeter.

At the end of each of the sections the participants simply form themselves into a meaningful tableau in the next area toward the congregation. One person in each section can move the Christ candle to its new position.

Finally — The script and suggestions presented here are designed for ease of execution. If you and the participants have more time for rehearsal or are interested in a more ambitious production, some changes can be made. One suggestion is to assign the rest of the dialog, except, of course, for Jesus Christ's lines, to the characters themselves. For example, John would say his own words, the same for Pilate and the rest. Eliminate Reader 1 and assign his/her other lines to the remaining two Readers.

# BLOCKING DIAGRAM



**LAST SUPPER  
AREA**

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SMALL TABLE 1



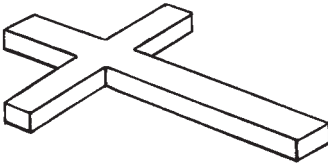
**GARDEN, BETRAYAL  
AND DENIAL AREA**

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SMALL TABLE 2



**TRIAL AREA**

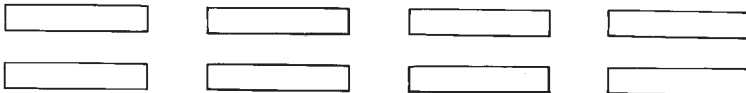


**CRUCIFIXION AND  
DEATH AREA**

*CROSS SHOULD BE LEFT  
LYING DOWN  
UNTIL LAST SCENES*

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**CONGREGATION**



1 **READER 1:** Many of the events surrounding the last days in  
2 the life of Jesus Christ are shrouded in darkness.

3 **READER 3:** In the fourth century, a solemn observance  
4 known as “Tenebrae” was celebrated.

5 **READER 2:** The church or place of worship in these services  
6 is brightly lit at the beginning of the Tenebrae service.  
7 At the end of the service there is total darkness except  
8 for the Great Candle on the altar, the symbol of Jesus  
9 Christ, the light of God’s love.

10 **READER 1:** The word Tenebrae means “shadows” in Latin,  
11 so this becomes a Service of Shadows. The gradual  
12 extinguishing of the lights and candles is symbolic of the  
13 flight of the disciples and friends of Jesus and the  
14 resentment of the world leading to the final isolation of  
15 Jesus on the cross. As we see the pageant unfolding, we  
16 are reminded of our own falling away and the consequence  
17 of separation from God.

18 **READER 3:** At the conclusion of the service, the Great  
19 Candle is carried out of the room to mark the three days  
20 in the tomb. The tolling of the thirty-three bells — one  
21 for each year in the life of Christ — is begun. The Great  
22 Candle is returned to the altar, the symbol that the  
23 meaning of the cross is fulfilled, and that the light of  
24 God’s love can never be extinguished.

25 **READER 1:** After the Christ Candle has been returned to the  
26 altar, the congregation leaves the church silently. There  
27 can be no benediction until Easter morning.

28 **READER 2:** The Last Supper — The Passover day finally  
29 came. This was a national Jewish holiday to celebrate  
30 the night so long before when the Israelites escaped from  
31 Egypt. The angel of death killed all the oldest boys in  
32 each Egyptian family that night, but he passed over the  
33 houses with lamb’s blood on the door. It was because the  
34 angel “passed over” them that this celebration was called  
35 the Passover.



1 **READER 1:** In this last year of Jesus' life, Passover fell on a  
 2 Thursday. Jesus gave instructions to his disciples about  
 3 where they would hold their dinner.

4 **READER 3:** In the evening, Jesus arrived at the appointed  
 5 place with his disciples and they all sat down for what  
 6 was to be their last supper together.

7 **READER 1:** Jesus told them:

8 **READER 4:** "I have looked forward to this hour with deep  
 9 longing, anxious to eat this Passover meal with you  
 10 before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won't  
 11 eat it again until what it represents has occurred in the  
 12 Kingdom of God."

13 **READER 1:** Later, as they ate the Passover supper, Jesus  
 14 said to them:

15 **READER 4:** "One of you sitting here eating with me will  
 16 betray me."

17 **READER 1:** He meant that one of his disciples would tell the  
 18 Jewish leaders where he was. This would enable them  
 19 to arrest Jesus when the people weren't around to protect  
 20 him.

21 **READER 2:** The disciples were very surprised and sad when  
 22 they heard this. They looked at each other, wondering  
 23 which one he was talking about. Peter motioned to John,  
 24 who was sitting next to Jesus, to find out what Jesus  
 25 meant. So John asked Jesus:

26 **READER 1:** "Lord, who is the one who will do such a terrible  
 27 thing?"

28 **READER 4:** "It is the one I will give this piece of bread to  
 29 when I have dipped it in the dish."

30 **READER 1:** Then Jesus gave it to Judas Iscariot and said to  
 31 Judas:

32 **READER 4:** "What you are going to do, do quickly." (*JUDAS*  
 33 *leaves.*)

34 (*Light cue #1*)

35 **READER 3:** The Agony in the Garden — (*JOHN moves the*

1 *Christ Candle.*) After the Passover supper, Jesus and the  
2 eleven disciples made their way toward the Mount of  
3 Olives to rest and to pray. On the way, Jesus gave them  
4 his last instructions and they were saddened at his words.  
5 Peter was particularly sad. Filled with love for Jesus, he  
6 said:

7 **READER 1:** "Lord, why cannot I follow you even now? I will  
8 lay down my very life for your sake."

9 **READER 4:** "I say to you, Peter, that this very night before  
10 the cock crows twice, you shall deny me thrice."

11 **READER 3:** Peter protested, as did all the others, but Jesus  
12 remained silent until they reached the Garden of  
13 Gethsemane at the foot of the mountain. Peter, James  
14 and John entered the garden with the Lord, while the  
15 others waited outside. Jesus then said to the three:

16 **READER 4:** "My soul is filled with sorrow; a sorrow that  
17 almost kills me. Stay here and watch while I pray."

18 **READER 3:** He went a little further into the trees and threw  
19 himself upon the ground and cried out:

20 **READER 4:** "O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass  
21 away from me; but thy will, not mine, be done."

22 **READER 3:** So great was Jesus' agony that drops of sweat,  
23 like drops of blood, ran off his face onto the ground.

24 **READER 2:** During this agony of the Lord, the three disciples  
25 fell asleep, and when Jesus returned to them he said to  
26 Peter:

27 **READER 4:** "Could you not watch one hour with me? Watch  
28 and pray, lest you enter into temptation; for the spirit is  
29 willing, but the flesh is weak."

30 **READER 2:** He returned to his prayer and cried aloud to  
31 heaven:

32 **READER 4:** "My Father, if this cup cannot pass away unless  
33 I drink it, thy will be done."

34 **READER 2:** Once more he found Peter, James and John asleep;  
35 so he returned to his prayers without awakening them.

- 1     **READER 3:** The third time he returned to the three he found  
 2           them still asleep. Looking down at them he said:
- 3     **READER 4:** “Sleep on, now, and take your rest. Behold, the  
 4           hour has come when the Son of Man will be betrayed  
 5           into the hands of sinners.”
- 6     **READER 3:** But hearing a sound in the distance, he said to  
 7           the sleeping disciples:
- 8     **READER 4:** “Rise up and let us be going. The traitor is here.”  
 9           (*Light cue #2*)
- 10    **READER 1:** The Betrayal and the Arrest — (*JAMES and JOHN*  
 11           *raise their heads and face the candle.*) Then Jesus and the  
 12           disciples went toward the entrance to the garden where  
 13           they could hear the clanking of armor and see the  
 14           flickering of torches. There they found soldiers from the  
 15           Pharisees and Judas.
- 16    **READER 3:** And Judas, seeing Jesus, rushed forward and  
 17           embraced him. (*JUDAS comes to the candle.*)
- 18    **READER 4:** “Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”
- 19    **READER 1:** As the temple guard came forward to seize him,  
 20           Jesus advanced to meet them.
- 21    **READER 4:** “Whom do you seek?”
- 22    **READER 1:** (*Or a GUARD*) “Jesus of Nazareth.”
- 23    **READER 4:** “I am he.”  
 24           (*Light cue #3*)
- 25    **READER 2:** The Denial — All of the disciples fled except  
 26           Peter, who followed Jesus and the soldiers to the home  
 27           of the High Priest.
- 28    **READER 3:** In the courtyard, one of the maids who worked  
 29           for the High Priest noticed Peter. She looked at him  
 30           closely and then announced:
- 31    **READER 1:** (*Or FIRST WOMAN*) “You were with Jesus, the  
 32           Nazarene.”
- 33    **READER 2:** (*Or PETER*) “I don’t know what you’re talking  
 34           about!”
- 35    **READER 1:** Just then a rooster crowed.



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