



# Working On Worship (15)



## Time to Think? Time to Pray?

### There *was* the time *WHEN*:

- 'assembly' or 'collective worship' was often called 'Prayers'
- 'hands together' was automatically followed by 'eyes closed' and everyone knew it was time for a prayer
- you practised assembly and the hardest decision was deciding if the 'practice prayer' was really a prayer or not!
- Ofsted asked if CW fulfilled requirements for worship, and there was a rush to add a prayer to every assembly.



### And then there is *NOW*, when in many schools:

- it's okay to have meditation or reflection and we value a two-minute silence but something called a prayer is very suspect and might offend
- humanists or atheists seem to forget there are religious people who want to pray, as well as non-religious people who say a prayer from time to time
- children's experience of prayer is often little more than listening to someone else's words and saying 'amen' (I agree) at the end
- prayer, at even a basic level, completely vanishes in the summer holidays between primary and secondary school.

### *But equally there is the NOW when:*

- church schools are inspected on the impact of their worship and are encouraged to provide prayer corners and opportunities for prayer outside this time
- all schools are expected to provide for pupils' spiritual development as well as provide a daily opportunity for worship of God
- pupils should learn about different kinds of prayer in Christianity and about prayer in different faiths in their RE lessons

## A legal requirement

Currently there is an expectation in law that children in all schools will be given the opportunity to worship God and, in church schools, an expectation that encountering God in prayer is something of central importance and worth setting aside time to do properly.

**The Law says:** all pupils (should) take part in a daily act of collective worship

**Government Circular 1/94 says:** *Collective worship should aim to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider spiritual and moral issues and to explore their own beliefs; to encourage participation and response.*

There is no specific requirement for how an opportunity to worship God should be provided. It could involve listening to a spoken prayer, the use of a song, a period of directed reflection, a time of quiet contemplation and stillness. The guidance does say that all pupils should be able to participate whatever their background, age or aptitude.

## What is Prayer? How does it relate to 'worship'?

Prayer is communication with God, spoken or silent. Christians learn about prayer from Jesus who prayed to God as 'personal', not just a force in the universe but someone with whom a relationship is possible, someone there to hear (John 17 v.1, Matthew 26 v.36). Jesus taught his followers the 'Lord's Prayer' (Luke 11 v.2-4), encouraging them to call God 'father' (abba or daddy) as he did.

Praying is part of Christian WORSHIP, which encompasses many different ways in which a person shows their recognition of God's greatness e.g. through song, dance, service, obedience.



## Prayer in a Church of England School

Prayer may occur in many places in a church school: *collective worship, mealtime graces, end of day prayers, prayer corners / prayer spaces, at Governors' Meetings or staff meetings, parents' prayer group, displayed on walls, in class prayer books.*

For some pupils their only role in prayer is to say 'amen'. It is important that Church schools plan opportunities for pupils to experiment with, and experience, prayer which is more akin to 'communication' with God about what is real and important to themselves. Opportunities, such as those below, can add to the spiritual development of the whole school community.



**In the classroom** - Prayer corners are common but pointless in a classroom if they are not used regularly. An occasional 'pop-up' prayer station with a limited purpose can be more effective, e.g. writing prayers for a specific reason and adding to a prayer wall. Some classes have successfully incorporated a small prayer 'tree' on which children can hang prayers to use in class worship.

**In the hall or foyer** – a themed prayer board with pencils and post-its and activities, can be very effective. Works best when a class is taken to use it or it is explained in CW itself.

**Outside** – prayer garden, quiet bench, labyrinth? All work best with specific activities.

One way into using small prayer opportunities is through reflective events, set up by a local church or run in-house, e.g. a '**Prayer Spaces**' week

(<https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/>) OR

'**Experience Easter**' (<https://www.imaginer.co.uk/jumping-fish-publications/>).

*This latter publisher also sells the useful 'Prayers for Life in a Church Primary School'.*

## Time to Think, Time to Pray: Prayer in Collective Worship

The time-honoured phrase 'hands together, eyes closed' has largely vanished but a succinct starting phrase is useful. 'Time to Think, Time to Pray' is an easy to learn phrase which indicates that the school is moving into Reflection and Prayer. It can act as the point where leadership is passed over for someone else to lead prayers.

A prayer candle may be lit. Quiet music might be played. A picture or thought may be suggested as a focus for reflection.

Time is given for everyone to settle into quiet. (This needs practice. Watching the candle, counting silently, breathing gently, holding a small wooden cross or heart, listening to or joining in meditative singing e.g. from <https://www.taize.fr/en> ) Don't rush in!



Children or adults may come forward to read a prayer or say their own prayers – *maybe 'Teaspoon Prayers' – TSP (3 prayers – Thank you, Sorry, Please)*

**OR** *there may be no spoken prayer at all. Experiment with silence - like the Remembrance Day silence. Use a montage of pictures for children to look at and say their own silent prayers can work well. Try breathing to some simple words said under the breath e.g. I am with you always – a bit like the 'Jesus prayer'*

**OR** *use a prayer activity e.g. from 'Swatch and Pray' – feeling the woven threads of your clothes and knowing you are part of a family*

<http://catholicyouthwork.com/portfolio/books/swatch-and-pray>

Finish by saying together e.g. the Lord's Prayer, a School Prayer, some intercessory prayer (see below) or a blessing or collect (see below) or saying the Grace.

**This portrays prayer in CW as quite different from a quickly read prayer but it is worth considering moves towards this.** Added to a simple story rather than extended explanation, it may completely change the feel of CW. It may be that one day of the week becomes PRAYER assembly. 'Time to Think, Time to Pray' should be just that – quality time given to prayer and reflection.

## Different forms of prayer

In a C of E school, it is good to experiment with prayer forms used in Anglican churches. Many have set structures and include simple responses making them school-friendly e.g.

**'Call and response'** – In church, a leader lists things to pray about, and, after each one, a set response is said together (litanies / list prayers). In school even EYFS can join in as the short response is said (even signed) in unison e.g. 'We thank you Lord' or 'Bless and keep them safe'. Children can suggest things to include.

**Confession** – In church, Christians call to mind things they do wrong and say sorry to God. In school, occasions to admit wrongdoing can be cathartic. A simple prayer of confession or moment of quiet can be used. You could also try:

- 'Confession song – Lord I pray' (*Out of the Ark 'Songs for Every Occasion'*)
- *I'm Sorry – God wraps us in his love' (Veritas – Grow in Love)*
- *Simple confession hand 'signs' - [www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/saying-sorry/](http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/saying-sorry/)*

**Collects** – In church, these prayers 'collect' everyone's thoughts together; they are written to a set format, with special ones for each Sunday and festivals. Children can write 'clothes-line collects' (see below). Peg sections up in order and then read out.

### **How to write a clothes-line collect:**

1. Address (What do we call God?) e.g. Great God / Creator God / Loving God
2. Attribution (What has God done?) e.g. who made our universe / who gives life and breath / who cares for us each day,
3. Petition (What would we like God to do?) e.g. help us love our neighbours / show us how to care for your beautiful world / strengthen us with your power
4. Purpose (Why would we like God to do this?) e.g. so that our children can enjoy its beauty too / so that we reflect your great love to all who need it / so that we can persevere even when things are hard for us
5. Closing (How do we end our prayer?) through Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, Amen

*Example: Great God, who knows us all by name, watch over us as we learn and play today, so that our school may be a place where all feel safe and special, through Jesus Christ, your Son, Amen.*

**Intercessions** – In church, the congregation speaks to God about the needs of others, often including a call / response such as: Lord in your mercy/ Hear our prayer. Intercessions include prayers for the country, the local church, the sick, etc. At school children can be encouraged to do the same. They could choose pictures e.g. world, Britain, school, sick person, family/ friends, and say a simple prayer on that topic. Starter words could be put on the back of the pictures.



**The Lord's Prayer** appears in most Anglican church services and should be said or sung (even signed) often in C of E schools. See [WOW paper \(14\) – Using the Lord's Prayer.](#)

## **Prayer in the SIAMS Evaluation Schedule**

**Strand 6** refers to prayer in: **What is the impact of Collective Worship?**

- Offers the opportunity, without compulsion, to all pupils and adults to grow spiritually through experiences of **prayer**, stillness, worship and reflection
- Enables all pupils and adults to appreciate that Christians worship in different ways, for example using music, silence, story, **prayer**, reflection, the varied liturgical and other traditions of Anglican worship, festivals and, where appropriate, the Eucharist.



*In a 'Good' school 'Prayer is a natural and valued part of the culture of the school. It is not compulsory or forced. All those who wish to do will have regular opportunities to pray and reflect. Pupils talk about the value of prayer and reflection both in formal and informal contexts ..... pupils speak of their personal use of prayer and reflection.'*

*In a school which is better than 'Good', there may be 'varied and interactive prayer and reflection activities on offer to all pupils which they find helpful and supportive.'*

**Schools where prayer and reflection play a limited role in school life, will do little to raise spiritual awareness, and need to make urgent changes.**