



# family@church

*making all age worship easier*



## ***A resource to help rural churches grow!***

*“It covers all the bases in a very user-friendly way  
and I can see why it is so immediately accessible  
and popular with families”*

**The Rt Revd Dr Mike Harrison, Bishop of Dunwich**

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InHarmony is St Edmundsbury Cathedral's project to enrich and resource music in worship across the Diocese. Our research indicates that many churches want help with planning and leading All-Age Worship, so we are pleased to recommend *family@church*. It's a welcome new resource, comprehensively written with small Suffolk Anglican churches in mind, and provides an excellent starting point for all involved in preparing acts of worship that engage both children and adults.

*Richard Hubbard Parish Music Development Researcher St Edmundsbury Cathedral*



<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page 3</b>	<b>The Vision</b>
	<b>5</b>	<b>Before You Begin</b>
	<b>6</b>	<b><i>family@church</i> Rules</b>
	<b>8</b>	<b>The Welcome Team</b>
	<b>9</b>	<b>Welcome Cards and Hospitality</b>
	<b>10</b>	<b>Advertising and Evangelism</b>
	<b>12</b>	<b>Pastoral Matters</b>
	<b>13</b>	<b>Music</b>
	<b>15</b>	<b>Bible Readings</b>
	<b>16</b>	<b>Festivals and Themes</b>
	<b>17</b>	<b>The Worship</b>
	<b>23</b>	<b>Baptisms</b>
	<b>25</b>	<b>Team Work</b>
	<b>26</b>	<b>Family Views and Comments</b>

## The Vision



The vision and energy for an easy-to-use family service resource came about when I was asked to lead family worship at Fornham, Suffolk, whilst in my first curacy post. Thrown in at the deep end and with no real knowledge of the congregation at Fornham, I planned a simple *Service of the Word*, suitable not just for adults and regulars, but also for children and those new to church, fully aware that this church was a hot spot for baptisms, which I would inevitably become involved with.

We gave leaflets advertising the service to the congregations who came for the Christmas services (Carol Service and Christingle). As the months went on we delivered leaflets to home, wrote to all those families who had had baptisms in the past year and encouraged those who came to the services to share leaflets too. Over the next three months numbers at the service went up month by month, to 30, 50, 60 and 115 in April. The 115 was due partially to it being Easter Day, but broke a church record for an Easter service! We also invited several families who were exploring baptism, but also families who had come to collect their baptism candles after previous baptisms.

In May, June and July, numbers continued to remain between 60 and 70 for the monthly family service, which by that time had taken on the firm identity as *family@fornham*. We repeated this model in the Cockfield Benefice at Felsham and we saw growth in a similar way.

So, what are the principals of the *family@church* model?

### **Liturgical**

The *family@church* model is moulded on the *Service of the Word* found in Common Worship. It allows for flexibility but provides firm stability, a good introduction to (Anglican) worship and space for those new to church to come to faith. The *Service of the Word* is not a fresh expression of church, but the way this model uses it as a springboard is fresh and new. A key component to the worship is using the familiar to introduce something new, in this case the Gospel narrative. Using the *Service of the Word* offers familiarity and therefore space to inject the Gospel message in a unique, fun and attractive way.

## **Stable**

The *family@church* model is based around the stability of the Church's Calendar, using it to inform the worship and tell the whole Christian story to those new to Church. It provides a three year plan that hopefully leads congregations deeper into God's presence as well as explores their personal place in the life of the church family – using their gifts, Baptism or Confirmation etc.

## **Blessed**

The *family@church* model is about recognising the blessing of God upon a church community and then sharing God's blessing with others. *'We become part of the transformation we hope for as our imaginations are resourced by the Spirit.'* (Ben Quash, *Found Theology*, 2013). This model is for churches who proclaim 'Blessed be God forever' week by week but struggle to share that blessing in order to grow. *'God is constantly creating the event we call 'church' for the sake of the world's completion'* (Robin Greenwood, *Sharing God's Blessing*, 2016, SPCK) Greenwood summarises that in blessing God we are thanking him because he is the source of all blessing and we ourselves are blessed by him. It is when we fully recognise this that we are able to share 'church', God, with others. We need to be identifying those areas where God is blessing us and asking him to use us to be a blessing to others. Each church is unique and different so there is no one answer to how or where God is blessing your church. However, central to it is our continuous blessing of God in our prayer and praise. *family@church* encourages you to find out the gifts of the blessed and put them to use in being a blessing to others.

## **Faithful**

The *family@church* model is about building up the regular congregation in faith and grace, as well as welcoming and nurturing those new to faith. Without a congregation or benefice committed to *sharing* God's blessing the model will probably not work. Therefore, initial work should be done in prepping the regular congregation so that they may take 'ownership' of the service. There is a chance to be involved in the planning team, but I would encourage the whole congregation to gather together to find a common vision. The cliché here is Proverbs 29:18: 'without a vision the people perish.' In some translations the word 'vision' is 'prophetic vision' or 'revelation'. It is true though, where God's blessing is not known, valued, treasured or even received, the people perish. We can only grow if it is God's blessing we are sharing, not our own! People are attracted to the attractive Gospel through the window we call church. The Message paraphrase puts it nicely:

*If people can't see what God is doing,  
they stumble all over themselves;  
But when they attend to what he reveals,  
they are most blessed.*

## Before You Begin

Before you consider if *family@church* is right for your church or benefice, use the following as a study within your Ministry Team/Worship Team.

- **Blessed and a blessing:** Ephesians 1.3: ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.***  
Questions: Where are you blessed – worship, music, welcome? How can we be a blessing to others?
- **Expectant and expecting:** we can only be blessed according to our expectancy (Proverbs 29:18). When we are expectant that God will work we're able to receive and see more than we ever desire – Psalm 23 talks about being anointed by God and having an overflowing cup. Mark 11:24: *'So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.'*  
Questions: Are we an expectant church? Do we expect to see great things happen? Do we expect to see God provide growth?
- **Reliant and reliable:** in being reliant on God to provide for us in all he asks us to do (like stepping out and growing our churches, or starting a new family service), he can then make us reliable (stable) to meet the needs of those new to church or hearing the Gospel for the first time. Proverbs 3:5-6: ***'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.'*** John 12:26: *Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.'*  
Questions: Are we a reliable church? Can people rely on us? What do we need to change in order to make us (our congregations, our services, our worship patterns) more reliable?
- **Praying and prayerful** (pastoral): prayer forms the basis of all we do as a church. Being a praying church means we become a united, deep and testimonial church, connected in fellowship. Acts 4 31-34: *'When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them.'*  
Questions: Are we prayerful? Would others recognise us as a praying church? How do we make sure there is no needy person among us?

# The Rules

Below I have noted some of “the rules” that have helped make *family@church* a success. These may of course work in other settings and for other services, but combined they form the framework for this particular service and for allowing for growth.

## **Same, same, same!**

Dedicate the **same Sunday** every month, the **same venue** and the **same time** for the service. Consistency has proved vital in attracting families. Dedicate one church building (if you're in a group) for the all age worship. Think about which church has the best access, facilities (toilet, kitchen, organ) and the space needed.

The time of the service should be the same every month. It is difficult for busy people, busy household, busy families to readjust to a different time every month. On the whole, your principal service time is the best time to stick with. this doesn't mean you can't have breakfast before or lunch after!

## **Identity**

People love belonging to something with a name! Identify your service and don't shy away from giving it a 'brand'. The '*family@...*' works for most, but don't be afraid of calling your all age worship something different.

Use your name on the order of service cards, screen, books etc as this will help people invite others in the long run. Stick with the “set” liturgy, as this will bring stability and consistency as people build up a faith and grow in confidence.

## **Go Ahead Anyway**

If the Sunday falls on a major festival where Holy Communion must be celebrated, I strongly believe that the service should still go ahead, but with a more family friendly communion, possibly making use of the new children's Eucharistic prayers. You can see some examples of an all age *family@church* Communion service on the website. Don't be afraid of adding in Communion. Just make sure it is simple, well-advertised and all age!

## **Pray, pray, pray!**

Both Fornham and Felsham churches, and many others who have followed the model, have put in many hours to pray and bless the project. If we feel called by God to lead an evangelistic service like this, then we must pray for it as often as we can. Thank God for the opportunities and pray for those who attend and all the leaders.

## **Advertising**

This model has a strong emphasis on advertising and word of mouth. This must be encouraged from the outset. See *Advertising and Evangelism* section.

## **Welcome**

The welcome and greeting should be confident and solid. Often the first barrier is the church door – how does it open and what is behind it! Have someone in the porch to direct, greet and open the door! Refreshments and hospitality should be served before or after the service to give time to build relationships. See *notes on Welcomers and Hospitality*.

### **All Age means All Age!**

This is a family service (all age) and it should be just that all the time from start to finish! Having a craft activity for children at the back of church whilst the rest of the service progresses may distract some. Causing adults and children to separate may also leave out those who attend without children. It's also worth remembering that this might be the only time a whole family spends time together in worship and prayer, so being *together* in church is special. Those who attend 'alone' should be spotted and made welcomed too. It's a hard balance to achieve! Work to try and include all in any activities or movement and in the language used in church.

### **Be an Anglican!**

This model encourages new people to church by using the familiar – church building, bells, robes, hymn book etc, but it surprises with its fresh, clean cut way of playing on all the stereotypes of "C of E". We're not trying to achieve anything 'new' except growth, rather this model, along with many others, breathes life into something that exists already. This hopefully creates a familiar atmosphere and more importantly helps break barriers of wrong stereotypes about 'church' or 'God'. On the whole, people are comfortable with a vicar in robes or hymn books. Use what your church does well.

### **Short and Sweet**

Services should run for about 40/45 minutes. This doesn't limit the work of the Spirit to 40 minutes, but merely frames our own efforts to see him work in the lives of those who come. As with all our worship, we ask that God works beyond our time frame, and he always does! Coffee time, pastoral work, casual contact are all ways the Spirit can continue working on those we have contact with.

## The Welcome Team

**The Welcome Team** is one of the most essential parts of the *family@church* model. The success of this model largely relies on the Welcome that people receive as they enter church.

The Welcome Team should consist of a team of people who are friendly and lively, not afraid to approach or talk to people and who have an eye for detail. The team ideally has about 6-8 people, who operate in teams of 5 each month. This is a much larger team than the usual welcome team in most churches.

Each month, the team should fulfil the following roles:

- **One person** outside the church door/porch to be a welcoming face and to push open the church door.
- **Two people** behind the door to give out books/sheets and to point to seats (and toilets, area for refreshments, children's corner etc)
- **Two people** mingling among the congregation, showing to seats and generally talking to people.
- *After the service – two people to stand by the door to say goodbye and give out next month's poster!*

Name badges have worked really well at *family@felsham*, but make sure they are large and bold, or it isn't worth it! Seeing someone with a badge gives people permission to approach if they need.

Make sure the entrance is uncluttered and that it is clear where people should move to when they enter the church. The Welcome Team should be in place at least 30 minutes before the service starts, welcoming any early comers, and they should remain 'on duty' throughout the duration of the service, helping late comers as well as guiding those who need to find the toilets or children's corner.

From asking people how they feel as they enter a church, I have gathered that it is a "frightening" experience for most, especially for those with children and pushchairs/buggies. Many said that it is also a really exciting thing too – so let us help make the experience of being in church a really good one!

*How accessible is the church? Where can buggies be placed in church? Can children wander to a children's corner? Is there a toilet? What book should I have? Is the door heavy to open? Do I need to have any money ready during the service? Where do I return my hymn book? Does it matter if my child tears or spoils a service sheet?*

**PLEASE** – if you have a curtain behind your church doors, please draw them back. The worst experience of walking into a church is to open the door and be confronted with (and engaged in a fight with) a huge curtain!

## Welcome Cards

Welcome cards are a great and relaxed way of getting to know members of the congregation (old and new!) Welcome Cards encourage people to fill in their name and address to say they are new to the church, they'd like a visit, or just so you have their details for the future. Some may not wish to fill these in, but I mention the cards at every service anyway, which can be found in the hymn book or in the pews. A few families who had been coming for a while handed a card back to me saying 'here are my details, we're interested in baptism'.

## The Hospitality Team

The Hospitality Team is also an integral part of the family service. Wherever I have experienced *family@church* there has been a desire to offer more than coffee and biscuits. This has extended from selections of cake and bacon butties to warm croissants and fresh coffee.

Whatever you provide and whenever you provide it (before or after the service), ensure that things are accessible. Think about the smaller details – napkins and wet wipes if you have sticky snacks, gluten free option etc.

Above all, the hospitality team continues to extend a warm welcome to all who come into the church, welcoming them as if they were Christ.

## Advertising and Evangelism

Over the past few years I have found myself constantly delivering leaflets and putting up posters on notice boards! Without advertising people won't come!

As well as one overall *family@church* poster, I've provided a set of twelve posters, one for each themed family service. I've tried to make them catchy and simple, but some have worked better than others. Use the posters and adapt them to your context and setting.

Whilst advertising at Fornham, I used a few basic posters and encouraged the congregation to share posters, post through doors and put up on notice boards and in the village magazines. However, in a benefice of six villages the task of sharing leaflets with every house at once became more of a challenge. However, using local village magazines the initial advertising was conducted, and more or less, most people in the villages received news of the service. On top of this, a different village was leafletted each month, with the host village (same every month) being leafletted more regularly. In most of the parishes there were a few people who were committed to, or at least talked into, door to door leaflet drops.

The Cockfield Benefice also had a website and Facebook page which I took advantage of. Links to various posters and photos were posted on the church website and Village Community Facebook pages were used to share posters and updates. The main family service poster referred to the website for more details.

**Up, up and away!**  
**Want to go there?**



**St Peter's Church, Felsham**

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May, 9:30 am**

***Balloons will be provided!!!***

*breakfast treats from 9.30*



**1 cross + 3 nails = ???**

**Find out more with us**

St Peter's Church, Felsham

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April

9:30 am

*breakfast treats from 9.30, Easter Egg hunt for the children*



*social action – all ways are valid as long as Jesus is central to it.*

My rule for advertising is to keep it simple and keep it regular. If we're trying to tap into busy families, then we need to keep reminding them of what's coming up and when, so that they can put us in their diaries too!

*Please think about the environment and about costs too! Print double sided or reduce posters to A5 or postcard size. Think about printing in bulk which often costs less... plan ahead.*

### **Evangelism**

Encouraging any congregation to be so proactive with leaflet drops or sharing the news of a service is a hard task, but I've found that it pays off. You may want to work with your congregation to see this task as part of their mission and evangelism work.

- *How might we tell others about this service? Might lead to...*
- *How might we tell others about Jesus?*
- *How might we grow our congregation, even if it's just for one service? Word of mouth, posters or*

*Some definitions from Church of England website, from the Lambeth Conference 1998:*

*"For Anglican Christians God's mission is about transformation - transforming individual lives, transforming communities and transforming the world. As we follow Jesus Christ, we believe that God's mission is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in three ways:*

- *through the Bible*
- *through the tradition and life of the Church*
- *through our own listening, praying, thinking and sharing as we respond to our own context."*

A large part of the vision behind the *family@church* model is this idea that we believe we are blessed so we want to share the blessing with others. Before evangelism is done, it's important for the team to jot down (note form will do) the reasons why they want to share with others what is going on.

- *Why do we want to share the joy of God with others?*
- *What good will providing a breakfast or biscuits do in helping us share the Gospel?*
- *In what ways are we already blessed as a church? How can we share that blessing?*
- *In what ways are we already being a blessing to others? How might we improve?*

Lead your team in some time of prayer and a Bible study. You could use passages like Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Mark 6:7-13, John 20:21.

It often seems that Anglicans are fearful of telling others about God directly. However, asking them to share news of services and events usually comes a tad easier! Avoiding the word 'evangelism' isn't a bad thing if it means people will spread the word about the service itself and in turn about Jesus Christ.

## Pastoral

Using any returned 'Welcome Cards' and any uptake of baptism requests I've found myself visiting families and individuals who have attended the service once or twice or who are on the edges of the church community. The service is great, pastorally speaking, for bringing in those exploring baptism too.

Each service is based on a major church festival. However, careful thought is needed by the leader as to the sensitivities that surround each season, especially Christmas, Mothering Sunday and Remembrance.

That said, it is important that each service remains real. Don't avoid tricky subjects, but handle them with care. In the prayers, pray for those on the sick list, leaving silence for people to quietly name those they know too. When writing prayers down, ensure you make people aware what will happen to them after the service, who will be able to read them etc. On reading some of the prayers, you may become aware of a whole world of people with concerns and thoughts. Follow up conversations or pastoral visits may be needed, or indeed the offer of it within a service.



## Music

Music should be according to the church's tradition or in a style that is done well and not too unfamiliar with other church styles. For example, trying to produce music that is of 'charismatic' style when the church only has use of an organist is not good practice. Part of the *family@church* model is about encouraging the gifts, skills and talents of the people that come.

You may only have access to an organist or pianist, so do use them. As time goes on though, you may find that you begin to attract others who can play instruments and wish to be used.

In one church the team began by using organ music and the church hymn book. By month five however they had two guitars and the organist who now play together. At another, the benefice was at a point where it was ready to draw some of its members together to create a small music group for the launch of the family services.

Whatever the music style or type it should be done well and sensitively. The music used needs to represent the local congregation well (to ease any divides and to break new comers into weekly services more gently). Music, in whatever form it takes, must be done to the best of the musician's ability.

### Choosing Hymns and Songs

- Hymns and songs should be chosen in a conversation between two people. The overall person leading the service and the music director, whether it is band leader or organist. This is important. Often, those planning the service are not musicians or familiar with playing instruments and therefore may not appreciate the complexity of some hymns and songs. Choosing hymns that are within the capability of the organist/group is essential.
- New material must be introduced over time and slowly! If there is a confident singer, it might be wise to have them sing it verse by verse or line by line *before* a service starts. (Perhaps during coffee or breakfast) It's important to introduce new music outside of the actual worship period so that the worship time can be used to do just that.
- There is no reason why a choir could not be present, and I would encourage using the gifts of those attending the family services, by recruiting them either to join the choir or to be involved in some way.
- The model of *family@church* works on a monthly 'festival' plan that follows the Church's calendar (Advent/Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and so on). The music at each

of these therefore needs to reflect the theme and festival of the month. Ideas and suggestions for hymns/songs are printed in the monthly planning sheets.

- There are four hymns within each service. I've found that using any more is too much for those new to church. Hymns/songs should include at least two hymns of 'praise' (see suggestions) and also a 'carol' for that particular festival. (A carol is a hymn that tells a story: i.e. a Christmas carol tells the Christmas story, an Easter carol tells of Easter and so on! There are plenty of carols in most hymn books that are well known. Once in Royal David's City (Christmas), We three Kings (Epiphany) and so on.
- Hymns/songs should ideally be from one source to save confusion in the pews and the switching from one book to another. If you generally use hymn books in church, continue to use them. One church I'm involved with currently uses hymn books but wishes to introduce music from other sources. To keep things as simple as possible for the congregation, we print the hymns/songs in the pew sheets, rather than using the hymn books.
- Hymns and songs for the family service should be chosen more sensitively than for weekly services where rotas and lists might dictate our hymn choices. A consideration of the gifts and skills required and involved should be of high importance.
- Don't fall into the trap of saying that new comers to church will only know *All Things B&B* or *Give Me Oil In My Lamp*. In both experiences of running these services, I've found that people can learn new music very quickly if they don't already know it! Never underestimate those in the congregation. We live in a fast world where new songs and tunes are heard almost daily – new comers to church can catch up with learning new songs. The beauty of the hymn is that the tune repeats itself several times over the verses, so usually by the end people have learnt it. If this isn't enough of an excuse to not be afraid of using a full range of hymnody, maybe the thought of singing *All Things B&B* at every service might put you off! *family@church* is about taking people on a journey, music is one of the most powerful tools we have in doing that.
- At some points in the service plans there are moments when music can be played whilst something is happening, for example whilst prayers are being brought forward. Careful thought needs to be given about whether to use a CD or not. It's great to have live music but you then must consider how the musicians can take part.
- It's always good for the musicians to think about the hymn/song:  
*Is it too high to sing? Is the rhythm difficult – how can we help teach this part? Are we playing too fast? Is the introduction long enough to allow people to find the hymn number and stand? Are we in tune with each other? Are there any tricky parts I need to practice more? Can I sing and play all the verses – think about layout/printing of the music? Is this piece suitable for our congregation, do we know it, what is the piece about?*

Before every practice and before worship, spend five minutes (together if you're a group, or with the minister/leader if you're alone) in prayer. Musicians lead people into a deep experience of God's presence. Pray for the wisdom and sensitivity to do this.

***“When we pray as a music group before the start of the service I find it really helpful. It helps me to focus on why we are there and who our focus should be on. I have been involved in music groups before where the focus seemed to be on the band and not on God. We, the music group, are there to help people to worship and feel and experience the presence of God. He should be centre stage and not us.”*** Karl Hunnibell, music director for family@felsham.

These are just some helpful tips. There are an incredible number of music styles within each church community and benefice, so the above are general pointers to get planning teams thinking. Above all, be as creative as you can and have fun worshipping the Lord!

## Readings and Bible Passages

Reading the Bible during Christian services is an essential part of our worship. It is often enhanced by good, confident readers. New readers should be nurtured and found from the congregation. This keeps the faces and voices heard in church changing, but also encourages more to use their gift of public speaking/reading in church. With two readings or one slightly longer reading, I've often asked one whole family to read it between them. Even if the adults read alone, the children have come to the lectern with them. Or in other cases the reading has been split. For example:

*Child: A reading from Acts chapter 2*

*Adult: When the day of Pentecost had come... as the Spirit gave them ability.*

*Child: This is the Word of the Lord.*

Do try to keep the announcement of the reading simple and short. 'A Reading from Acts, chapter 2' is often enough. Occasionally using a paraphrase, such as *The Message* works really well if the reading is particularly complicated. If you have a pew sheet have the readings printed so people can take them away.

Sometimes it is good to 'read' the Bible in a different way. Acting out a passage or using a dramatic version of the reading can be just as effective if done occasionally and well.

# Festivals and Themes

## Plan for Year One: Telling the Story

<b>December</b>	Advent/Christingle Service
<b>January</b>	Epiphany – the greatest gift of all
<b>February</b>	Candlemas – light for the world
<b>March</b>	Lent – using our hands!
<b>April</b>	Easter – Joy and Transformation
<b>May</b>	Ascension/Pentecost – What goes up must come down!
<b>June</b>	Trinity – God, Three is the magic number
<b>July</b>	Saints – surrounded
<b>August</b>	Jesus at the beach – I AM
<b>September</b>	<i>'Back to School' Service</i> – blessing of book bags, uniforms
<b>October</b>	Harvest – all good gifts around us
<b>November</b>	All Souls/All Saints – season of remembrance

## Plan for Year Two: Going Deeper

<b>December</b>	Advent/Christingle Service
<b>January</b>	Epiphany: direction for the Church
<b>February</b>	Candlemas: light to the Church
<b>March</b>	Lent: God's vision to the Church
<b>April</b>	Easter – Jesus: joy to the Church
<b>May</b>	Ascension/Pentecost – Spirit: life to the Church
<b>June</b>	Trinity – Indescribable God
<b>July</b>	Saints – Let us run the race
<b>August</b>	Holiday season – Bible: soul of the Church
<b>September</b>	<i>'Back to School' Service</i> – blessing of book bags, uniforms
<b>October</b>	Harvest – no gift too small: challenge for the Church
<b>November</b>	All Souls/All Saints – death and dying: hope for the Church

## Plan for Year Three: Biblical Characters

<b>December</b>	Advent/Christmas – Mary
<b>January</b>	Epiphany – The Magi
<b>February</b>	Candlemas – Simeon
<b>March</b>	Lent – John the Baptist
<b>April</b>	Easter – Mary Magdalene
<b>May</b>	Pentecost – Peter
<b>June</b>	Trinity – Adam and Eve
<b>July</b>	Thomas – Saints
<b>August</b>	Holiday Season – Jonah
<b>September</b>	<i>'Back to School' Service</i> – blessing of book bags, uniforms
<b>October</b>	Harvest – Ruth
<b>November</b>	Remembrance – Noah

## The Worship

The Worship is of course the central and most essential part of the *family@church* model and I believe it is the reason for its stability and growth. I've listed and noted some of my musings, thoughts and experiences.

This model suggests that church growth is possible whilst using a stable, core liturgy as a framework to family (all age) worship. There is something to be said about the modern family seeking security, stability and familiarity in worship. It is important to see the liturgy of this service as a springboard to opening up the Gospel to those who may be experiencing it for the first time. It appears simple and that is what it is. It should remain as simple as possible but yet maintain the solid framework to explore the monthly themes.

Over the first year, the services focus in on the basics of the Christian Gospel, introducing people to Christmas, Lent, Easter etc, therefore giving people an overview of the Christian message, with a chance to respond at each stage. The second year of services allows people to journey a bit deeper. The model overall is based firmly on the Christian year, thus giving congregations a chance to explore the whole Christian story and message. My own experience of the Christian year can be described as a journey that has drawn me in to its centre and rhythm and therefore deeper into a relationship with a living and active God and into the Church.

The leader of the service should be enthusiastic and lively but yet able to bring people into a deeper sense of the reality of the Gospel message – able to use balloons to illustrate a message and yet bring that to a realisation of the presence of the God – *'leading into mystery, into the unknown and yet the familiar.'* (Introduction to A Service of the Word) Worship is not entertainment, but that doesn't mean fun should not be had by all who attend this service! The aim is to draw people into the Gospel story, rather than just read and recite it to them. The Christian year is one to be celebrated and that is the focus of the themes and activities during the worship.

*"A Service of the Word is unusual for an authorized Church of England service. It consists almost entirely of notes and directions and allows for considerable local variation and choice within a common structure. It is important that those who prepare for and take part in A Service of the Word should have a clear understanding of the nature of worship and of how the component parts of this service work together." Intro to Service of the Word.*

On the USB stick and in your resource pack you will find the layout of the Order of Service for the *family@church* model. The worship is based on the Common Worship *Service of the Word*, but has been laid out in such a way that breaks it down for those less familiar with church services. It is on one folded A4 piece of card, with easy to follow titles and headings. The service is in four main parts:

- **Preparation (God's Family Gathers)**  
*Includes the Gathering, Welcome and the Confession*
- **The Liturgy of the Word (God's Family Listens)**  
*Includes Bible Readings and Talk/Sermon*
- **Prayers (God's Family Prays)**  
*Includes Prayers, Collect/s and Lord's Prayer*
- **Conclusion (God's Family Goes!)**  
*Includes the Creed, Notices and Blessing*

The Introduction to the Service of the Word says:

*'The primary object in the careful planning and leading of the service is the spiritual direction which enables the whole congregation to come into the presence of God to give him glory.'*

This is the basis for *family@church* worship. It should draw us all together, regardless of family status or age, and draw us closer to God, giving him the glory. Knowing that, as a Church, we are blessed by God is a wonderful thing alone. However, sharing that blessing with others can unleash so much more than we ever expect. I've found that once we've realised how blessed we are, people are attracted to us when we begin to share it. God allows us to grow in grace as we also grow in number.

## Preparation: God's Family Gathers

- **The Welcome** should be enthusiastic and warm. (See 'The Welcome Team') *'Welcome one another, as Christ welcomes you' Romans 15:7.* What happens before worship is just as important as what happens during worship. Before the service you may wish to have breakfast or refreshment as people enter.
- **Notices** should be kept to a minimum here. There is a space for Notices towards the end of the service. Point out the toilets if you need to, the welcome cards and a welcome to all, especially noisy children!
- **Church family news** is encouraged to be shared – news of any new births, moving house, new pet, birthdays etc. (Sometimes sad news was shared too, so be prepared). Make sure you have complete control of this sharing. Don't let Auntie Agnes dominate the sharing every month because her great great niece has had a birthday. You may need to say *'that's all we've got time for, but I'm glad so much is happening in our church family...'* The sharing of news should be short and punchy, lasting no longer than 3 minutes with the singing of Happy Birthday if you wish. I've found this short time to be a good way to pull people together, to get them thinking and praying for each other and share experiences and journeys with the whole church community, however short the sharing of news is! I've also

found that for those in the congregation this is a great way of practicing bringing the 'whole of ourselves' into our worship – that is what God wants after all!

- **A very brief introduction** of the theme for worship is introduced. *'Today we're thinking about the Holy Spirit as we celebrate Pentecost... Pentecost is a bit like the Church's birthday party, so I hope you're ready for a bit of a party!'*
- **The Confession** follows sensitively and naturally from the introduction of the theme if possible. *'...so I hope you're ready for a bit of a Party!'* First though, since we are in the presence of the Spirit who invites us to that party, we can have confidence to confess to God our sins, those things we get wrong in our lives... Prepare some very short and simple one liners to lead from the introduction of the theme into the confession. Here are a few of mine:
  - *'Since God is here with us and he loves us so much, we can confess our sins to him...'*
  - *(Easter) 'Jesus' resurrection brings joy and life, so, let us bring to him all those things that hold us back from living that life...'*
  - *'God's love is perfect and he wants ours to be too. Let us tell him about all those times when we've failed to love...'*
  - *(Lent) 'In the desert Jesus was tempted in every way. He helps us confess those times when we've been tempted...'*
  - *(Saints) 'Since we are running a race surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, let us give to God all those things that weigh us down...'*

You may wish to have a symbol that represents sin and the power of God's forgiveness.

- A chalk board which can be wiped clean.
  - A bin liner with screwed up pieces of paper in.
  - Two pieces of a large torn heart coming together as one.
  - A cross or picture and so on.
- **SONG** (see 'Music')

## The Liturgy of the Word: God's Family Listens

- **The Reading** follows the first song. Explain to the reader clearly to come up after the song, where to stand and how to read. (See 'Readings')
- **The Talk/Sermon** should be no longer than 5 minutes. This can be extended if there is an activity included within the Talk (see service plans for ideas). The talk should use simple language, referring to the theme/festival and therefore to the reading (directly or indirectly). I've often included a challenge towards the end of the talks to give people a chance to respond if they want or need to.

For the first year, the idea is to teach the basics of the Christian faith, which are summed up by using the Christian calendar, drawing people into that cycle and therefore the Gospel story.

The talk should never separate children from their families or groups. Not all who attend have children and therefore could feel excluded. Also, for many families, this is the only time they get to sit together and be together throughout the week – church should be a place where they can stay, sit, pray and be together. In doing so, families learn a deeper sense of ‘family’ as they become part of the wider family – the Church. There is chance to interact with others at many other points throughout the worship.

Sometimes the talk includes an activity. If this is the case, care is needed in how and when to bring the occupied congregation back to a quiet and more orderly group! For example, the *Year One, May Pentecost* service suggests that during the talk you encourage people to write on gift tags and attach to balloons. Don’t let this drag on too long. Note when the majority have finished and affirm that if people wish to continue writing during the next hymn they may do so.

The Talk and Sermon ideas are just that – ideas. Don’t feel you need to read them word for word. Relate to your context/church where relevant, or add your own church’s tradition and style to them. Before you give any talk, learn it as best you can and use notes as a prompt. This will give you the ability to move around and interact with people, but also a security to those listening that you know what it is you are preaching!

This is the central part to this service and the Liturgy of the Word and is ‘*at the heart of the service.*’

- **SONG**

## **Prayers: God’s Family Prays**

- Always use simple everyday language: thank you God, sorry God etc. Prayers are usually led by someone from the congregation or ministry team. The prayers detailed in the service plans are just suggestions to what could be prayed. There are some good books of intercession for All Age worship. Overall, prayers were short and to the point.
- Prayers were followed by the Special Prayer of the day (Collect). The Collects printed are the Collects for the festival/theme being celebrated. Alternative Collects are published in Common Worship. The idea is to use the best Collect prayer which sums up the festival/theme.

- Prayers end with the Lord's Prayer in modern language: *Our Father in Heaven*. The key to getting people used to the Lord's Prayer in modern language is how the leader brings people into the first line, ensuring there is no pause after 'Our Father.'
- If there is an activity during the prayers (interactive prayers), try to conduct this in a more reflective manner. Try to ensure that the activity does not overlap with any spoken prayers.
- Prayers should be relevant with the world, local and global church and others (those who need our prayers).

- **SONG**

*During this song, the church may wish to receive a collection/offering. I have found that keeping this in is important in helping people become familiar with church practice and routine during worship. However, I have also found and learnt that this needs plenty of warning and sensitivity. I've previously used phrases similar to (and I'm paraphrasing here) 'during this hymn a collection will be taken... then you can go enjoy refreshments!' Of course, this is not what I meant – however much we may think it's needed to fund our work! Keep the collection announcement completely separate from any other notice or announcement. Also, give plenty of warning so as not to catch anyone unawares as the plate comes round. There is nothing more embarrassing than holding the plate up whilst you have to dig in your bag or pocket for money. Maybe leave a short gap in between announcing the collection and the hymn number? Giving people time to prepare and getting them into the routine of giving is an important part of bringing our lives, time, effort and money before God.*

*Alternatively, you may wish to leave a collection plate at the back of church as people enter or leave. Again, plenty of notice is needed to indicate this.*

*Avoid using 'please give as generously as you can'. I've found that there can be a good bit of competition or embarrassment between those who regularly come to church and give huge amounts, to those new to church uncertain how much they should give – or why they should give at all!!*

## Conclusion: God's Family Goes!

- If there is a baptism family present (returning to collect their candle – see 'baptisms') the welcome is given here. The response '*Shine as a light...*' is on the service sheets.
- **The Statement of Faith/Creed** is said: '*We believe...*' This is a really important component of this service. The Creed (or statement of faith) gives people a chance, whether we see it or not, to commit themselves to God as a response to all they have heard and experienced in the service.

- **Any Church Family notices** may be given here. Again, keep this short and encourage people to read notice boards and pew sheets. Announce the next family service date and theme, and invite people to take posters as they leave. The notices are a great chance to encourage further discipleship and to share the activities and events within the church or benefice that will deepen faith and strengthen commitment. We live in a culture of invitation and advertising – do tap into that culture. What small groups or courses are running? Is there a Confirmation class starting? Is there a men’s breakfast or toddler’s group? If there isn’t many activities why not create some? A simple pilgrimage or a more organised trip to a Christian gathering may be an idea?
- **The Blessing** is given here, using a seasonal blessing.
- **SONG**
- After the service, the Welcome Team should be on hand to collect service sheets and to give out next month’s poster as well say goodbye. If you have refreshments after the service this process may take longer, but it remains an important part of the welcoming process.

## ***family@church* does Baptisms**

The *family@church* model encourages churches to separate the liturgical welcome of the newly baptised from the rest of the baptism liturgy. If the baptism takes place outside a main service in church then the welcome should take place in the next *family@church* service. This encourages families to return to church, often bringing a few supporters along with them to receive their candle and baptism certificates. It also allows the main body of the church to welcome and greet the newly baptised.

If you conduct baptisms outside of a family service I have produced an easy to follow baptism order of service which matches the *family@church* model, layout and style. It uses the new baptism liturgy and is centred round the elements used in the baptism service – oil, water, fire. Its headings are easy to follow and aimed at guiding those new to church through the service: *‘God’s Family... Gathers... Listens... Makes Promises... Prays.’*

If the baptism takes place within a *family@church* service, I have tended to conduct the promises and anointing with oil before the service begins with parents, godparents and a few friends and a few witnesses from the congregation (church wardens etc). This way, if baptisms are regular during family services, they do not overtake the general flow of the monthly themes and activities and it ensures services do not overrun. If this is the case, I would generally announce the following in the Gathering and Welcome:

*A warm welcome to this church... we especially welcome any visitors and family X to be baptised in this service. Before the service they made their promises with me to turn from those things that hold us back from God’s love and to turn towards light and goodness and to trust in him. We can all do that now too... [lead into the confession...]*

This takes a huge amount of pressure off families who are not so confident about standing up in front of people to speak. It’s important to remember that we are used to standing up in front of large crowds of people we often don’t know to declare what we believe. This is not the case for most of the people we baptise or those acting as godparents. This is often a ‘scary’ moment, or even embarrassing, and making promises that involve sin and ‘God’ that may not sit comfortably with those making them. This is the stark reality of many of the baptisms we see. People have come for the ‘nice’ ceremony and wetting of the baby’s



head. This model seeks to break down those barriers by easing their pain (i.e. they still must make promises, but in a less threatening and less pressured way) and without losing our integrity or the meaning of baptism!

If those being baptised are regulars to the family services, then it might be worth considering conducting the promises within the service so the whole congregation can hear. To do this every time a baptism occurs however is not appropriate. If you conduct hundreds of baptisms every month, keep the service separate, using the format laid out, but invite families to receive their welcome, candle and certificates at the following family service.

Be sure when you visit baptism families that you make clear the two dates that they will need to attend church for the baptism itself and then the giving of candles and certificates. I've never had any rejections to come twice and I've worked with those families who can only come once (because of distance or other pastoral reasons). I've also had families who cannot make the following family service but have simply attended the next service. On the whole, this system works well and encourages more engagement with families and the congregation and introduces them to a friendly family service.

Don't forget to stay organised so you know when each family will be returning to church!

<b>Name of Child/family</b>	<b>Date of Baptism</b>	<b>Date to collect candle</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<i>Joe Bloggs</i>	<i>20<sup>th</sup> May (outside of regular service)</i>	<i>June family service</i>	

## Team Work

“ You call us all to live, and see good days,  
Centre in Christ and enter his peace,  
To seek his Way amongst our many ways,  
Find Blessedness in Blessing, peace in praise,  
To clear and keep for Love, a sacred space ”  
That we might be beginners in God’s grace.

*Malcolm Guite, Sounding the Seasons, 2012, Canterbury Press ©*

Regularly get your team together to review how each service has gone, to assess if the team’s gifts are being used in the best possible way, to suggest changes, to plan ahead and to pray together.

You may want to discuss some of the following questions in your teams:

- *Review of the service/s, planning of the next service.*
- *What gifts do we have within the planning team? What gifts do we have within our church?*
- *How are we using those gifts? Do we need to change anything to accommodate the gifts of others?*
- *What is God’s ‘blessing’? Use some biblical passages.*
- *How are we sharing that God given blessing with others? Are we seeing any fruits from this?*
- *Who is coming to our services? Are new comers returning? Have we visited them? How are we keeping in touch with them?*
- *Give thanks for what is working and seek to improve those things that are not working so well.*
- *What sort of place are we being? Worshipping, prayerful, social?*
- *How might those new to church be able to be honest and open about life, prayer, discipleship and commitment?*
- *Is there space for witness, worship and wonder?*
- *Is there space for tears, openness and emotion?*
- *What are we ‘offering’ to those who come? Are we offering hope, joy and love?*

## Family Views and Comments

I asked a couple of families who attend *family@felsham* what they thought about coming to the family services:

*“The last two family services at Felsham were really inspirational, all of us thoroughly enjoyed them and the children asked why church wasn’t always like that. We had some great discussions about the theme with some interesting views from the children.”*

Things they said they liked:

- The interactive nature of the services with the opportunity to answer and ask questions during the Talk.
- The strong sense of ‘theme’ of each service.
- The ability to get involved in the service by reading, taking up the collection, ringing the bell and talking to others.
- Breakfast before the service!

Things they didn’t like about regular church:

- Congregation not getting involved.
- Words used that they can’t understand. Service overly complicated and long.
- Not enough variety of tone from the leader of the service.
- Long sermons!