

Advice for Clergy and Visitors leading Collective Worship in Church Schools

1. As part of preparation for leading worship in a church school, it is essential for there to be a conversation with someone from the school to confirm expectations on both sides. It may be useful for the visitor to see the school's collective worship policy. Visitors are strongly advised to try to visit an act of Collective Worship in the school before leading one. It will provide invaluable information about **the way that the school understands and engages with collective worship** as well as well as clues about behaviour management and practical routines (including what activity takes place once the worship time has ended). It will also enable the gaining of important insights about the pupil population and typical responses to invitations to participate. It provides a chance to discover songs the pupils sing.
2. **'Collective' worship is different from 'corporate' worship** in faith communities. In all schools pupils and staff come together from various backgrounds: some Christian, some of different religions and some of none. It is important that the visitor/clergy is aware of make up of the school population before preparing to lead worship.
3. In church schools, worship should be Christian but it must **also be suitable for all to be able to participate**, whether actively joining in or listening reflectively. In an act of worship there should be an important idea - simple and clear - from which all can learn, whatever the background.
4. It is a great privilege for representatives of the Christian community to speak about faith in Collective Worship - for all concerned. Pupils can be moved and inspired by hearing from people sharing about the faith that underpins their lives. **Collective Worship in school is an opportunity to share**, not proselytize, so it is important to remember to say... *Christians believe, The Bible says, In our church, Jesus taught* ... This will help everyone know whose ideas are being shared. The presence of a large percentage of children from a faith other than Christianity, in the act of worship, changes the context considerably, and this guidance about identifying the source of the beliefs is particularly pertinent here.
5. As there may be number of pupils and staff who either are members of religious communities other than Christian ones, and those who have no religious background, it cannot be assumed that everyone has a great **knowledge of Biblical characters and stories, Jesus, church or different Christian festivals**. This will be **the expertise of the clergy or visitor**, and, as such, is a valuable offering to the school in collective worship.
6. It is likely that themes and topics for Collective Worship follow a yearly plan. It is helpful if the clergy or visitor can **make a distinctive Christian contribution to the theme for the day**. Sometimes, however, schools can be flexible and welcome topics that are not part of the plan. It is important for the clergy or visitor to check what and how much is expected.

7. The act of worship in school may follow a basic shape or structure lasting a reasonable time,

Gathering – maybe music, a candle, a greeting and song led by children or staff,

Engaging - it could be a story, demonstration, drama, song, pictures

Responding* - it may be a time for stillness, prayers, an activity, questions and answers or singing

Sending – this could be a blessing or a focused question before the school is dismissed by children or staff.

Clergy or visitors should check beforehand which parts of the act of collective worship they will be planning and leading.

* Sometimes pupils might want to explore ideas about faith further, but this is better done with a trusted adult in school.

8. In preparation and delivery, clergy or visitors should try to **bear the following in mind:**

- the youngest children – *what is there for them to look at and enjoy?*
- size of visual aids – *will all be able to see?*
- careful preparation of questions to be asked of children during the act of worship – *what kind of answers are anticipated? If these are not forthcoming, can the question be rephrased?*
- how to handle inappropriate response - *small children always put their hands up even if what they have to say is not pertinent to your theme!*
- time is limited!

and remember not to:

- use sexist, racist or homophobic language
- speak disparagingly or inaccurately of other faiths
- put pupils on the spot and insist that they own their beliefs – *it will make everyone feel uncomfortable and thus destroy the atmosphere of the collective worship*

9. Having **pupil volunteers** can really add a sense of familiarity and anticipation to the act of worship. Staff can be asked to help with selecting pupils for this purpose.

10. **Prayer** is a very important part of collective worship in the church school, and care needs to be given to the way that it is used, and how people are invited to participate. The clergy or visitor should use prayer (or a quiet moment for reflection) in a way that does not compromise the integrity of pupils or staff but encourages everyone to take part. Some ways of introducing it are as follows: *Let's be still and quiet now / Time to pray or think / Please listen carefully while I say / read a prayer* Thought should also be given to how to end this time as well. It is possible to say at the start.... *"If you agree with the prayer you might want to say, 'Amen'."* Helping the pupils gain a broader understanding of different ways in which Christians may pray may be another gift offered by the visitor e.g. sung prayers, prayers using sounds, or whole bodies, or prayers with actions. Is there a prayer which pupils are used to saying together (such as a school prayer) that could be used? Do they ever say the Lord's Prayer together?

Finally, asking for **feedback** from staff after the event is brave, but valuable. Even more courageous is seeking the views of pupils, but it is a good move for us all as it can make us better aware of how well we are able to assist the school community in approaching worship.