

Derby Diocesan Board of Education School Resource Materials

Collective Worship in the Anglican Church School

A guidance document for teaching staff and governors.

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Many colleagues have asked for guidance about worship in the church school. The main concerns seem to be around the issues of content, distinctiveness, day to day organisation, creating an appropriate atmosphere and allocation of time for worship. This paper attempts to address some of the issues raised by colleagues but cannot replace personal contact between myself and your staff. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me at Derby Church House to arrange for me to visit your school.

THE LEGAL POSITION

There is a legal requirement for all schools to have a daily act of worship for all children (unless they are withdrawn by parental request). The legal details were set out in the DfEE Circular 1/94 which should be available in all schools. It is anticipated that this circular will be superseded in the near future, but that the general legal requirements will be very similar.

In Circular 1/94 there is a distinction made between collective and corporate worship. Collective worship takes place in schools and involves individuals who may not be professing members of any religious group. Corporate worship takes place in a church and involves a group of people committed to the same faith. This is a very important distinction. Professor John Hull offers this simple explanation of the differences:

“ Collective Worship brings children to the threshold of worship.....”

It is not the role of the teacher or worship leader to attempt to push children over this threshold through attempts at conversion. This point needs to be clarified with visitors invited into school to lead worship.

CONTENT OF ACTS OF WORSHIP- and introducing the Anglican element.

Worship is not just a hymn and a prayer. It should have all or most of the following elements:

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- Prayer, silent, spoken, formal, informal.
- Praise, hymns, songs, poetry, drama, dance, mime.
- Stories, Bible, traditional, modern, from different faith traditions.
- Sharing of personal experiences, thoughts and ideas.
- Sadness and joy.
- Quiet reflection, silence, activity and excitement.
- Music for listening and responding to.
- Artefacts and natural objects.

It is important that the children gain some experience of the Anglican tradition, through prayers, simple liturgy and traditional hymns. Maybe instead of “Good morning everyone”, it might be good to start with, “The Lord be with you.” (response: “ And also with you”), or “The peace of the Lord be with you.” (response: “and also with you.”)

It is through school worship that the children are made aware of the key Bible stories and are able to experience aspects of the Christian year. Very few children experience silence in their every day lives. School worship can introduce them to contemplation, reflection and feeling comfortable with their own thoughts in a period of silence.

*** DISCUSSION POINT**

What are we expecting of the children when we say “Close your eyes and put your hands together”?

- Do we assume that they all know how to pray?
- Do we assume that they all want to pray?
- Do we teach the children about prayer and praying in RE?
- Do we explain what saying “Amen” (Amen = "so be it" or "it shall be so") to a prayer implies?
- Do we provide opportunities for children to pray (or not) in their own way?
- Do we allow them to offer prayers in their own style of language?

DAY TO DAY ORGANISATION

Collective Worship does not have to take place at a particular time, last for a particular length of time in a particular place or involve all the children at any one time. This can be very liberating. Schools are free to hold their worship in any part of the school buildings or grounds, in a church or other interesting place in the community. For example, one school has a worship tree out in the school grounds.

Schools are free to hold worship at any point in the school day. The law does not give clear guidance on the time allocation for worship. For reasons we do not understand worship does not count as curriculum time, but between 15 to 20 minutes a day would seem both practical and reasonable. Schools have found that OfSTED inspectors tend to comment if worship time is too long!

Collective Worship can take place in a variety of groupings to suit the needs of the staff, the timetable and the children. Whole school, key stage, departmental, year group, building, corridor, class or individual learning groups such as music tuition classes and special needs provision. This gives a lot of scope for flexibility and creativity within individual schools. The key to successful worship is the value placed on the activity by all staff and governors and thought that goes into making a meaningful experience for the children (and staff).

CREATING AN APPROPRIATE ATMOSPHERE FOR WORSHIP

Imagine you are four and a half. You are just getting used to this place called school. In this school there is a large room, bigger than anything you have at home. On your first day at school you went into this room and they gave you a meal on a rather odd plastic tray. Your sausage was dangerously close to your chocolate pudding.

On the second day at school you went into this room again but this time you took off most of your clothes, got quite excited running and jumping and climbing on a variety of boxes and equipment. On the third day you went into this room again but there was no food, you kept all

your clothes on and you were told stories about someone called Jesus and were told to put your hands together for him. (but not to clap it seems?). “What is going on here?” I hear you ask yourself!

Many schools are not fortunate enough to have a hall or other space, which enables the whole school to meet for worship in a truly appropriate manner. Nonetheless it is necessary to create opportunities for worship and establish an atmosphere in which worship can be meaningful and relevant to the children, especially for the little four and a half-year-old.

How then does one create the atmosphere for worship in a multi purpose hall, cramped classroom or other space around the school?

The first question to consider is how the children are going to be grouped. If it is difficult to create the atmosphere required with all the children present then it is worth looking at smaller groupings for the majority of the time, keeping the whole school occasions for special events. The second question to consider is the preparation of the room to be used. Ideally time should be found to ensure that all the children can be seated comfortably without too many distractions around them and that there is appropriate music, lighting and a focal point for the worship.

Ideally it should be possible for the group to gather quietly or silently (this means the staff too!) with something to listen to and look at that provides a link with the worship planned. It is good if unnecessary background noise can be kept down during the worship time (have a word with the kitchen staff), and if some technique for making the space feel different from its other roles is employed.

This may be through the use of banners, a cross, a candle or other artefact that even the youngest child appreciates as a sign that worship is about to take place. This may well be in a classroom and it is a good idea if children can be encouraged to help in the preparations but if all the group gather together in the prepared space when it is time for worship. One school gets all the children (including the helpers) to wait outside the classroom and enter together when the preparations are complete and the room is still and peaceful. One school has a permanent focal point in each classroom which each teacher maintains as they see fit but which the children associate with class worship.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COLLECTIVE WORSHIP AND ASSEMBLY?

Many schools still talk about assembly when they mean Collective Worship and some have Collective Worship which is really assembly. Assembly is really an organisational or PSE activity, a time when the school exchanges news and notices and deals with issues of discipline and school organisation.

The school may gather to hear about plans for sports day, school trips or hear a talk about drugs or road safety. This is an assembly.

Worship time is when the staff and children gather to experience a collective act of worship in which the key elements indicated on page 2 are readily identifiable. Some school actually timetable assembly and collective worship at different points in the day or week. Others find ways of indicating that worship is over and after a short pause assembly time (including those who do not take part in worship) commences. This might be done through fading up some music for a while, blowing out the worship candle, moving the worship focus or putting away banners or other artefacts used in worship.

Sometimes these boundaries become blurred when it is thought to be right to deal with a particular issue affecting the school through worship. This is a good thing to do providing the worship leader is clear about asking themselves, “yes, this is important to do, but in what way is it worship?”

*** DISCUSSION POINT**

Having read and discussed this paper invite staff to act as critical friends or as a fly on the wall and spend some time observing the Collective Worship offered to the children. Remember to invite feedback from the children.

Identify:

1. Those things with which everyone is happy.
2. Those things which could be changed and modified with little time or effort.
3. Those issues which will take time and planning to improve or enhance.
4. A time scale for action.
5. Opportunities to meet again to share progress.
6. Those areas for which you would like external support to assist your thinking.
7. An appropriate time to modify/re-write the school worship policy and planning documentation.
8. Re-evaluation.

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