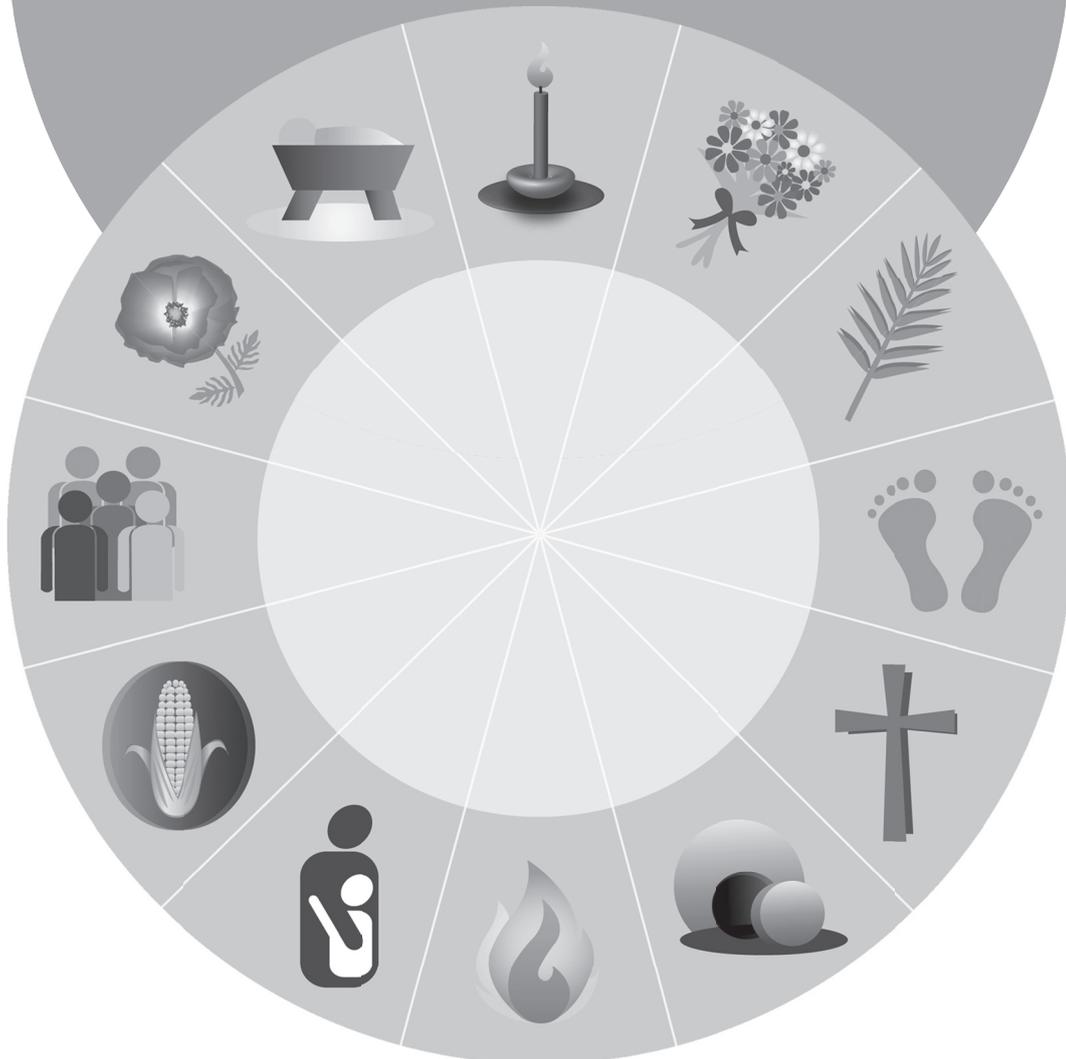


Festivals Together

Creating all-age worship
through the year



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First published in Great Britain in 2012

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
36 Causton Street
London SW1P 4ST
www.spckpublishing.co.uk

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978–0–281–06631–5
eBook ISBN 978–0–281–06632–2

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Typeset by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong
Printed in Great Britain by Ashford Colour Press

eBook by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Produced on paper from sustainable forests

Also available:
Worship Together: Creating all-age services that work

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*With thanks to all those churches willing to take risks and
create worship for whoever is present*



**Part
1**

**Creating all-age
worship: the key
components**

Before the beginning

If you have already used *Worship Together*, then you might want to skip this chapter, which gives a brief overview of some of the ideas and principles that underlie the worship outlines provided.

The worship outlines in this book are designed for all kinds of churches, big or small, well-resourced or not. Mostly they do not require endless cutting-out, hours creating complex visuals or developing demanding dramas that will only work with a large

congregation. They do not assume that there is a worship band or a well-resourced and trained team of leaders (though worship bands are great and training is invaluable!). They don't even assume that you will have lots of children and young people present. What they do offer is an approach that will work for whoever is present, with creative ways of hearing God's story that open up the possibility of encounter with his love.

Introduction

Festival is a great word and a great experience, one deeply embedded in contemporary culture.

It is estimated that there are at least five hundred music festivals alone each year in the UK, plus countless other types. There are history festivals, literary festivals, cricket festivals – almost any summer event can have the word ‘festival’ added to create an expectation of a time to relax, enjoy, be with family and friends, and perhaps discover something new. There are a few that are specifically for children, but all of them include elements that are for children and families, and in many cases children are simply there, taking part and sharing in the day.

At a music festival, I watched a three-year-old sitting high on his dad’s shoulders, swaying to the rhythm and clapping enthusiastically as a well-known indie band performed on stage. Elsewhere in the crowd

A festival is truly an event for everyone, an event for all the family

I saw a very mixed group, ages ranging from around eight to fifty-plus, including

teenagers, laughing and dancing together. A festival is truly an event for everyone, an event for all the family.

It’s not so very long since it was the Church that provided this kind of occasion, when all ages celebrated together. There were days when statues were carried, crosses were moved, banners were paraded, girls and boys dressed up and the holy day began with worship and movement before becoming a holiday for everyone. The early twentieth-century author Elizabeth Goudge includes wonderful moments of church festivals in several of her books, such as *A City of Bells* and in her famous children’s classic, *The Little White Horse* (sadly completely omitted in the film version, *Moonacre*):

The church was full of sunshine, children, and music . . . Robin gave him the great cross-handled sword and,

holding it aloft like a processional cross, Old Parson went striding down the aisle with it and out into the sunshine . . . When they were nearly at the summit Old Parson made them stop and get their breath back, and then, singing once again, they made their way beneath the branches of the beech-trees and through the doorway in the broken wall and into the paved court beyond . . .

First, standing before the altar . . . he said a very long prayer . . . for forgiveness . . . And then he prayed that for ever and ever this place should now be a holy place, and that no wickedness should be done here any more . . . And then Robin took his shepherd’s pipe . . . and to its accompaniment they sang . . . all the praising things they could think of. And then at last, reluctantly, because it was so lovely up here on the hill, they turned themselves about and went in procession back to the village, singing all the way.¹

You really have to read all of chapter 9 in *The Little White Horse* to get a full sense of the joyful festival that takes place when Paradise Hill is given back to God. It has procession and song and stillness and excitement – all the elements of a good festival. But somehow it seems so much more difficult to do this in our contemporary church world. There are still Whit Walks in many northern towns, including the city of Manchester as well as smaller places. But a quick search on the Internet will show that they are not quite as much of a public event as they used to be, although they still retain a real sense of festival. There are still wonderful pilgrimage events, when people of all ages gather from across a diocese or region and come together to celebrate the life of a local saint.

Only recently I listened to a young person reminiscing about Bank Holiday Mondays spent walking with family and friends before joining in worship at the local cathedral. A few years ago the Church tried to capture this sense of carnival when lots of Christians took to the streets to ‘March for

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Jesus', accompanied by drums, clowns, balloons and song.

In other parts of the world, and in other faiths, colour and movement are an integral part of religious life. Festivals almost always involve some kind of public procession, accompanied by crowds, whether moving in sadness or joy. A friend recently visited Sri Lanka, and described the extraordinary festival of Kandy Perahera, a solemn Buddhist tradition. As the procession moved through the streets, those working in shops or chatting in cafés simply stopped and stood for a moment as it went by. The festival has an impact on society as well as on those taking part, yet our Christian milestones seem to have become private affairs, in spite of their huge importance.

The difference between the kind of festivals now flourishing in society and those outlined in Scripture and handed down in the tradition of the Church is

Christian festivals are not about entertainment (although there may well be lots of fun and laughter), nor even about education (though we may be discovering new things about God's involvement with the world)

that our festivals are a re-enactment of sacred stories. Christian festivals are not about entertainment (although there may well be lots of fun and laughter), nor even about education (though we may be discovering new things about God's involvement with the world). Sometimes

they will be joyful occasions, at other times they will involve recalling moments of pain and failure, but whatever the theme the intention is that everyone will be involved. They allow us an opportunity to enter into the events that stand at the heart of our history and our faith and help create a space in which people of all ages have the possibility of encountering God.

Worship with whoever is present

Festivals are genuinely worship for all ages or, as I often call it these days, worship for whoever is present. It is not dependent on the presence of children to make it happen, but will truly have the

potential to allow everyone from nought to one hundred the possibility of worship and encounter. Yet there seems to be something strangely paralysing about the words 'all age' to our churches, with its understood subtext of 'Oh my goodness, that means there will be children there! What are we going to do?' Yet week in, week out, year in, year out, the Church holds worship that engages a wide range of different needs and life experiences, without anyone getting too worked up about it. We don't worry about a congregation with some young professionals in their thirties (for some

of us that would be positively exciting!) alongside the residents from a local care home plus the regulars who are between 65 and 90 years old. Somehow we trust the words of worship, the Scriptures and the prayers to connect with life. All our worship is for all ages: children are simply part of the mix. There may be occasions when we want to have special events for them or reflect on things that are clearly adult, but our festivals should be for everyone.

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The Hebrew Scriptures lay down guidelines for the commemoration of significant events in Jewish history, and it is clear throughout that there is a great deal of drama and participation by the people. The festival of booths (Leviticus 23.42; Nehemiah 8.13–18) always sounds like a great occasion, with people working together to build huts out of branches, then camping in them for a week, before holding the solemn assembly. The festival of Purim, which recounts the story of Esther, is also a marvellous occasion for family involvement, with much cheering and laughing throughout. However, it is not just the happy times which are 'for the children'. There are occasions when the people of God are called together for moments of high solemnity, such as the dedication of the temple or to be called to account for all that has gone wrong: 'Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the

congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast' (Joel 2.15–16). The Christian calendar likewise gives lots of opportunities to engage experientially with the story of the faith, at moments of celebration and also at moments of solemnity. Some of our festivals overlap with a festival in popular culture, most notably Christmas, and churches will use these occasions to engage not only with the regular congregation but also with those on the fringes of church life – and that will often mean younger adults and children. The challenge is to make the festival in the church significant and memorable for those who attend. It does not need to be memorable because it is better or brighter than the events going on in the secular world. It needs to be memorable because we have created a space in which all those present have the opportunity of encounter with God and of discovering a sense of belonging, together with a chance to experience the ways in which the story of God and God's people still touches our lives today. 'Encounter' and 'experience' are the key words. Being present and entering into an event is very different from being told or taught about it. That's

Being present and entering into an event is very different from being told or taught about it

why people go and queue for hours on the Mall to see great royal occasions. We know we will get a better view on television, but there is something indescribably different about being there. Being able to experience the atmosphere is why families take toddlers to rugby football or soccer or a live play: they want them to catch hold of something beyond words. The story is caught, not taught. A couple of years ago I was present in a cathedral at a special event for children. The highlight was a performance by a mime artist, who presented the story of Peter's life. The children were clearly entranced as the story (told by a narrator on CD) and movement worked together to convey Peter's despair at failing Jesus. Then came an amazing moment, when the music changed, and the mime artist made a huge leap into the air as 'Peter' realized that Jesus was alive again. Four boys, sitting near the back, leapt from their seats and punched the air, crying 'Yeah!' before realizing where they were, and

sheepishly sliding back into their seats. These boys had truly experienced the story, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

The shape of the Church's year

The church year takes us through the whole story of our faith in a series of festivals. We begin in the waiting time of Advent, looking forward to the coming of Christ. We move to the joyous celebration and mystery of the incarnation, the revealing of Christ to the world through the visit of the Magi and the response of Simeon, celebrated at Candlemas. At the centre of the church year is the great, intense, demanding series of events that lead us through Holy Week to Easter, stories with immense drama and emotion. We celebrate the coming of the Spirit to the Church, the generosity of God in Harvest and then remember his faithfulness through generations in the stories of saints. Alongside these there are other traditions related to the story of our lives – Mothering Sunday, Remembrance Sunday as well as local events. The opportunity to be part of these occasions is about being present, about being there rather than learning about it from others.

This is why festivals matter to us in the Church. Those present have an opportunity to catch something significant, which may be beyond words, but will be made up of the kind of movement, stillness and sounds that are characteristic of festivals everywhere. Unfortunately we seem to have developed an idea in the Church that some things are 'good for children' and some are not, so we may well have thought carefully about how to make our Christmas services engaging, yet never thought about Maundy Thursday as an evening for families. The whole cycle of the church year allows us to discover the stories that lie at the heart of our faith, and rediscover their relevance as we return to them at the different stages of our own lives.

Planning all-age worship that works: the key components

The challenge is how to make festivals, whether joyful or solemn, into these kinds of all-age experiences. Good all-age communication happens throughout our culture, and sometimes it seems as if

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the Church has handed over this task to these other agencies. Yet by looking carefully at these activities, noticing the way things happen, and then building some of those ideas into our worship, then we too can recreate festivals that truly engage all ages (there is much more on doing this in *Worship Together*). There are five key factors that help to create effective all-age communication, and these factors are also vital in creating all-age festivals that work. The five key elements are passion, structure, multi-sensory experience, mystery and universal themes. The rest of this chapter explains each of these briefly.

Passion

Before the ideas, before the music and the words, there is one crucial thing that festivals that work for all ages have in common. The more I have talked to people about all-age worship, and the more I have observed events in our culture, the more I have realized that this has to underlie the content of any event, whether secular festival or Christian celebration.

The central ingredient, the key to successful all-age events, is as simple as passion. And alongside a passionate excitement there is an unmitigated enthusiastic expectation that children of all ages want to be there. As a family make their way through the site of a well-known music festival, Dad is waxing lyrical about all that is happening. He is pointing out interesting things in the crowd, talking about what they will see later on: and the passion of adults is contagious. Passion is not simply about an extrovert zest for life. It can equally be a quiet, deeply held conviction that something really, really matters. Some children develop interests because of particular teachers or clubs, but many more have life-long interests because of their parents. Yet all too often adults

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approach the idea of children and church with the opposite of enthusiasm: 'I know it won't be very good, but don't worry because if you don't like it you can go to the back corner and do some colouring.'

Do colouring when the most amazing story in the world is unfolding in front of you? Why are we not jumping up and down with excitement and anticipation at the prospect of introducing our children to these stories? When this passion is in place, then a willingness to be imaginative grows, and it is from this passion that an ability to tell the story in a mind-catching way can also flourish. For churches, this kind of enthusiastic expectation that people of all ages will want to be engaged in our festivals and special occasions has to be part of the mindset of the congregation. It may begin with one of the leaders, but it is also the responsibility of the whole people of God to share eagerly the great stories of their faith. Although this kind of expectation is vital, by itself it is not enough. There are some other factors which help to make all-age communication happen.

Structure, pattern and repetition

One of the most important aspects of creating events that work for everyone is structure, alongside pattern and repetition. Some church worship has a weekly pattern and repetition, but at other times the pattern is rehearsed on an annual cycle. For example, in the Church of England, we use different responses from those used in the rest of the year during the Easter season (from Easter Eve until Pentecost), though it is the same response for those weeks, and the same response each year. This kind of pattern is vital in building a sense of familiarity and belonging. This is how we enter inside the story, rather than having to spend too long worrying about where we are, and whether we know what is about to happen. A familiar opening allows us to relax into the event, thus freeing our spirits to encounter God, rather than letting minds and emotions worry anxiously about whether the right thing is happening. This is the technique used by successful all-age events in the media and in our culture – whether it is the use of a theme tune or an opening catchphrase, or in a physical environment, making sure that the welcome at every Disney Park is the same!

Structure, alongside pattern and repetition, is used by successful all-age events in the media and in our culture

The difficulty for us in church is ensuring that there is enough that is familiar to those who attend infrequently, while still picking up the themes and resonances of the particular festival. A new approach is only new to those who are already familiar with what is happening; for others the whole event may be new. It can be easier to introduce completely new approaches when everyone is wrong-footed together – and to be wrong-footed we need to know what the right-footed approach feels like. For those with a residual memory of church, or a regular but infrequent attendance (e.g. every crib service), it will be the basic framework or structure that gives the sense of confidence and familiarity. Within that framework many different things might happen, but the walls are always in the same place.

Service structure

The good news is that worship has the same basic structure, whether it is for an ordinary Sunday or for a festival. The basic shape is as follows.



WE GATHER

This might be as simple as the opening responses or as complex as an activity involving a procession, drama and music. A significant part of gathering is usually a time of confession and absolution – we say sorry. This is an important moment in worship, as it allows for reflection on our lives and also on the failures we encounter in our world. It is also a reminder of the central message of our faith – the wonderful good news of God's love reaching out to us through Jesus.



WE LISTEN

There is a point in every act of worship where we listen to God's word, read from Scripture and let the word connect with our lives as either we explore it together or reflect together through a talk, activity or sermon. The word can be presented in all kinds of imaginative and engaging ways, in the reading of Scripture and in exploring together how that word touches our lives.



WE RESPOND

Having heard the word of God, we need time and space to allow ourselves to respond, whether in prayer for ourselves or for the world, and to allow ourselves another opportunity to be multi-sensory,

for physical and imaginative movement. Part of our response is also sharing in bread and wine – although strictly speaking the word Eucharist also refers to the whole liturgy.



WE GO OUT

Endings are as important as beginnings, and the final part of our worship needs to turn attention towards living our faith in our daily lives.

In some of the festival services this basic shape becomes more noticeably flexible. There is a repetition of the central pattern of listening and responding, as we may listen to more than one reading with more than one theme. This may all take place within the shape of a procession or even a meal, as the shape is also the vehicle for engaging with the story. However, it is also important that the structure of each individual occasion becomes familiar over the years, with the changes that happen occurring slowly to ensure that the worship remains alive and relevant. This is the way that successful products continue not just for a few years, but last for generations. A visit to a 'bygones' museum serves as a reminder of how subtly household names change their packaging and image over the years. A name like 'Fairy' or 'Mars' maintains a strong identity so that people continue to trust the product, and yet there are also tiny incremental shifts in design and style so that it is only when the 1950s product is placed next to the 2010 product that we see how dramatic the shift has been. In the Church, we often struggle to make small changes, and then make giant leaps all at once, leaving people feeling that nothing is recognizable, which may have the effect of making it very difficult to feel a sense of belonging.

A strong structure or framework not only helps those attending, but also serves as a tool for those who are creating the festival worship. The structure outlined above acts as a kind of mannequin on which the joyful or solemn clothes of the day can be placed. It is then relatively straightforward to look and see if there is too much in places, or whether there are embarrassingly

A strong structure or framework not only helps those attending, but also serves as a tool for those who are creating the festival worship

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skimpy bits which will seem awkward in public. The appropriate 'clothes' need to have the capacity to engage people on a number of different levels.

Engaging the senses

The great festivals of Scripture seem to have been events that engaged every human sense. There was music to listen to, the visual spectacle of procession, the smell of burning incense or sacrifice, the taste of the celebration meal and the touch that comes from being with crowds of people. Human beings are multi-sensory, yet many of our church occasions are limited to listening, with some visual elements as well. There are so many imaginative ways of creating worship that uses all the senses, particularly with some of the festivals, where the story we are telling

There are so many imaginative ways of creating worship that uses all the senses, particularly with some of the festivals, where the story we are telling is in itself a multi-sensory experience

is in itself a multi-sensory experience. Maundy Thursday is one such occasion – there is the possibility of tasting food, touching feet, smelling perfume, experiencing silence, and the visual impact of stripping the altars.

Using the senses in worship is sometimes about absence as much as it is about inclusion. The use of stillness and silence in contrast to noise and busyness can be very powerful and dramatic if done well.

Closely related to the possibility of being multi-sensory is also the challenge of using the space more effectively, something for which festivals give particular opportunities. Many of us are blessed with extraordinary buildings, with layer upon layer of history and an abundance of individual stories. Each and every dedication on a tomb or a stained-glass window is a gateway into a person's life, a life that may well have resonances with the challenges we face today. But even without knowing the detail, the colour and texture of walls, windows, ceilings and floors have the potential to be as inspiring as looking forward all the time towards the chancel.

For many younger children, simply being in the transcendent space of a church will be their encounter with God. There will be no need to quantify or explain this – it is an experience of

the spirit, not of the mind. Many adults will recollect moments of indescribable beauty experienced sitting in a service they could not understand with their minds, but sensing the flow of sound through words and music, gazing up into a cavernous roof space, spotting tiny angels or glimpses of colour, all of which will speak of God.

Festivals give us the opportunity to utilize outdoor space as well, which might be as simple as using the churchyard or as complex as developing a procession through church and community. The symbolic act of entering the church dramatically after a short period outside can be a powerful reminder of God's invitation. Adults worry a great deal about weather and whether it will stop something happening – younger people tend to be much less concerned, and unless there is an absolute deluge will be unafraid to go out in the rain (and even then teenagers revel in the opportunity to get soaking wet!). It may be that logistics need careful planning, with alternatives for those unable to move well or comfortably, but the experience of being outside is meaningful on many levels. There is the big outdoor space but also the miracle of mini-beasts hiding in the ground and the physical reminder of the community we live in – all these can be part of festival worship.

Mystery and wonder

Movement and multi-sensory activities all contribute towards moments of astonishment in worship – those moments in secular events that we might call the 'wow' factor. In worship this might be expressed in an exultant corporate shout of praise or equally in a profound moment of silence. Mystery and wonder are essential parts of all-age worship, and are at the heart of many of our festivals as we celebrate the unbelievable truth of God's revelation to the world. It is tempting at festivals such as Christmas or Mothering Sunday to fill our worship time with noise and activity, but it is equally important to have moments for reflection which not only allow for different learning styles and

Mystery and wonder are essential parts of all-age worship, and are at the heart of many of our festivals as we celebrate the unbelievable truth of God's revelation to the world

personality types to engage, but also have the capacity to draw everyone into wonder and contemplation.

There is a myth in churches that says that children cannot concentrate or cannot be still or silent. Children are more than able to concentrate if they are absorbed and engaged, know what is expected and are given a framework in which it happens. Announcing a period of silence (and delivering on the announcement) is more effective for younger children than an open-ended, unexplained vacuum which may or may not last more than a breath. In some of our 'solemn assemblies', notably the great Holy Week liturgies, silence is essential – but this does not mean children have to be excluded. It simply has to be directed well.

The experience of wonder is one of life's universal experiences. A toddler learning to walk will be transfixed by the mystery of a feather on the ground, and a middle-aged woman (me!) is equally awed by the commonplace spectacle of a spider's web stretching over fifteen feet across the garden. Older people will speak of their delight in watching the sun rise and even the coolest teenager will be awed by the extremes of creation.

Universal themes

Stories containing universal themes are another of the key components of successful all-age communications. Pixar films are among the best at doing this, identifying the core concerns of humans and then building them into a story that touches everyone – which is also why these films are eminently re-watchable, like the best childhood books, still appealing to us in adulthood. Questions

The great news for those of us trying to create all-age festivals in the local church is that the stories and teachings we are commemorating are rich in these kinds of universal themes

of us trying to create all-age festivals in the local church is that the stories and teachings we are

such as: Am I loved? What happens if I fail? How do I deal with disappointment? What is the purpose of my life? – these are all explored in classic, timeless all-age stories and communications. The great news for those

commemorating are rich in these kinds of universal themes. The task for us is to approach with fresh eyes and identify some of the core issues, whether in the stories of Jesus or the great narratives of the Old Testament.

Tips for preparing and leading

Every word doesn't have to engage every person

The assumption that everyone has to understand a story in the same way or gain a particular experience from worship is an unnecessary pressure that we place on ourselves when we create an all-age service. The space being created with words, music, visuals, activities, is a space of possibilities for encounter, not a learning space for education. In any given act of worship it may be one word or sentence that makes the moment of encounter, or it may be an overall feeling that is created, whereas large tracts of the words and music may be forgotten or ignored. That does not make the worship a failure. A child or adult who goes home after a Palm Sunday procession talking of the way in which everyone held a cross has not missed the point. The point is that there was the potential in the event for encounter – but the mystery is just how the Spirit might work in the lives of the 20 or 200 people present.

Likewise, we don't need to assume that there is one single meaning to any given reading: we may think that the main point of the parable of the Prodigal Son is about the loving father, but for one group I worked with there was a much bigger question about family dynamics and the impact of an absent mother. Family dynamics are universal, while not everyone experiences leaving home with the money!

Prepare and rehearse

All-age festivals in church are about possibilities, and they begin with praying hard and preparing well. Spend time understanding the occasion, researching customs and traditions as well as thinking about all those who might be present. Read the lectionary readings, think about them and look through the worship outline. Take time to think about how suggestions will work in your context with your local congregation. It is good to develop a 'worship

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planning team' who meet together regularly, and this team should, if possible, include some younger people.

Once a festival outline has been developed, make time to rehearse. It is absolutely normal to have a rehearsal for a wedding service to make sure that the key people are confident about what they need to do on the day, yet we often create complex worship services which involve movement and activity and have no time to practise. Rehearsing drama, readings and prayer as well as movement makes a huge difference to the way in which a service happens, and when it moves with pace and conviction it is much easier for people to be drawn in and engaged.

Music

Most of these outlines do not contain recommended hymns or music. However, music is an important element in our worship, perhaps particularly so during festivals, and the choice of music that is sung by a congregation or by a choir is significant. There may also be opportunities for introducing new music or for listening to contemporary sacred or secular music, especially during times of reflection or intercession. Use the gifts and skills that are present locally across the age ranges, whether playing instruments, singing or composing.

Pre- and post-review

After designing a worship outline, it is good practice to do a mental review of different people in the congregation and ask the question: 'Is there something with the potential to engage Jake, aged 6, here and something for Joan, aged 86? Or are there things that will prevent them engaging –

too much action, too little movement, etc.?'

It doesn't mean that these are the things that will engage them, but that the possibility has been provided. It is also vital to review the worship afterwards, checking where logistics were a problem, where things connected and where they didn't, and reflect on why. This helps to build up a sense of what will work in your context.

Be a leader

During the worship, lead and participate with conviction and commitment, which helps to make sure that the emotional tone of the worship echoes the themes and the words. One of my earliest memories of church (I was not from a churchgoing family, but went to some school events) is pondering the mystery of the words: 'All people that on earth do dwell/sing to the Lord with cheerful voice', which seemed to be sung in the most miserable way imaginable. Even today, it amazes me how easy it is for congregations to give the word 'Alleluia' a meaning akin to 'This is the worst day in my whole life'. This kind of dissonance makes it difficult to experience the full meaning of a festival, particularly one that is meant to be a joyful celebration.

Festivals are an incredible gift to the Church. They can be a tool for mission and evangelism, giving opportunities to engage creatively with the community, but they are also waypoints in our personal discipleship, giving us a chance to encounter the familiar themes and stories in new and challenging ways. Festivals offer opportunities to rekindle faith on a personal level, and yet also to make a visible impact on the community. Festivals really matter to us – so above all, enjoy!

Note

1 Elizabeth Goudge, *The Little White Horse*, 1946, ch. 9.

How to use this book

There are fifteen festival outlines in this book, each of them offering something different. They range from the familiar occasions such as Mothering Sunday to the solemn days of Holy Week.¹ The ideas that are offered are jumping-off points, and can be adapted and developed in tune with the local situation. It is important to learn what will work in your environment, both practically and emotionally. There are physical limitations and opportunities that differ, and there are congregations that enjoy some approaches to worship, while other activities can be a stumbling block. Although all of these outlines offer different ideas, in reality it is valuable to build confidence through familiarity. Using the same words is important as it enables people to create a memory bank of sacred texts which they can use with ease, allowing them to experience a sense of belonging.

All the liturgies can be used as eucharistic worship within a common worship framework, and they are based around the relevant lectionary readings. Outlines can be used as a whole, or elements can be used separately, perhaps to introduce new ideas, or to add creativity in different contexts such as school or community worship events. Festivals are also opportunities to take worship into new contexts, perhaps holding services after school or in a village hall, and these outlines can be adapted for these situations.

The outlines that follow are ready to be used. They are not dependent on the presence of children to make them work, but rather designed to help everyone present into worship. You can use them as they are or use them as jumping-off points. If you have never done anything creative in worship before, it's possible to take one section alone and use it. For example, you might decide to introduce a creative way of leading intercessions or a new approach to presenting a reading.

The outlines are built around the structure talked about earlier. These notes should be read in conjunction with the worship outlines.

Title

Each outline has been given a title, which informs the choice of activities and the approach to the content. There is also a short introduction which gives a brief background and ideas about where the outline might be used.

Lectionary

The choice of readings is indicative, taken from the time of year. You will need to use the appropriate readings from the authorized lectionary when the service is the principal service of the day. Check the specific notes for each festival.

Preparation

There may be special areas of the building or outside areas to prepare prior to the worship.

You will need

This section lists the items you will need to source for the worship suggestions. It is a good idea to build up a store of items that are used frequently, and at the end of this section there are some suggestions as to where some items can be sourced.



WE GATHER

Make a note of any suggestions for movement during the opening hymn. There are also suggestions if anything needs to be handed out before the service begins.

Opening hymn

It is good to choose a robust, well-known all-age hymn as the first hymn. If you expect a significant number of those unfamiliar with church, choose those that are lodged within the national psyche (e.g. 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven') and be mindful of the hymns that parents would have

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known from school (e.g. 'Lord of the dance'; 'One more step'), as well as those that children are learning today. The music needs to be appropriate for whoever is present – remembering that the wordiness of most hymns precludes non-readers from joining in anyway. A good strong tune where the rhythm can be felt by preschoolers is very helpful.

Opening praise/worship

Where a 'voice' is suggested, this can be anyone of any age and does not need to be an authorized minister.

We say sorry

Within the Church of England, only authorized forms of confession and absolution can be used. All the suggestions in this book conform with this expectation. If a lay person is leading the service they should use the inclusive 'us' form of the absolution.

Making connections

The words set in a panel, to be spoken by/given to whoever is leading the worship service, are suggestions for linking or introducing the worship activities. Please feel free to adapt these words or to be impromptu as appropriate.

The Gloria or hymn

There are many settings of the Gloria to familiar tunes. It is important that the congregation become familiar with the tune and words used or, if there is a choir, this might be an opportunity for the congregation to listen to something fresh. The Gloria is not used during Lent or Advent.

The collect or prayer for the day

In the Church of England, the collect for the day must be used at the principal service of the day and in those seasons where the authorized lectionary must be used. In a 'service of the word' other collects can be written, and *New Patterns for Worship*² gives suggestions for writing your own. The prayers in this book are specially written or selected and are not the collect of the day (unless indicated as such).



WE LISTEN

Readings

There are suggestions for presenting readings, and sometimes specific versions or adaptations of a reading are recommended. There are also some original scripts (see the 'Additional resources' that follow some of the outlines). Remember to rehearse any dramatic versions and to practise reading. If you are using more than one reading, don't do elaborate things with each reading. Keep one or two simple, and use just one in a different form.

If the service is a Church of England Eucharist and you are using only one reading, it must be the Gospel.

There are many different versions of the Bible. Some are translations, some are paraphrases and some are story versions. Good translations for regular use are the *Contemporary English Version* or the *New Revised Standard Version*, both of which use inclusive language and are good for reading aloud. (Check whether older editions of translations use inclusive language.) *The Message* is a paraphrase, which sometimes makes a refreshing – and surprising – alternative, particularly for some of the prophets and Psalms. Story versions, for example, *The Lion Storyteller Bible*,³ *The Book of Books*,⁴ *The Big Bible Story Book*⁵ and many others, are often helpful. Some story versions of texts are quite lengthy, and will also have a particular interpretive slant, of which you might want to be aware.

The talk

This is a suggestion for an all-age talk based on the readings and the festival. It can be used as a jumping-off point and should be adapted in the light of specific readings and local contexts. (All the talks in this book have been used on different occasions, and frequently adapted!) The text set in a panel provides a suggested outline for a talk.

Hymn

Many services will include a hymn or song somewhere in this part of the service. In a formal service it may be known as a 'gradual hymn'

(but many church attenders have no idea what this word means, and it should be avoided for all-age services). This hymn should be a shorter, more direct hymn that reflects the readings.



WE RESPOND

We believe

Each outline offers a suggestion for a creed or affirmation of faith. This has to be included in a Church of England principal service on a Sunday but is not essential in a service of the word. The form used must be authorized, and the majority of the outlines in this book use the same form each time. This is to help build a sense of familiarity and belonging, but it is appropriate to use an alternative, particularly during special seasons of the church year. There is also a 'making connections' suggestion, words in a panel, spoken by the minister/leader, which can be adapted as an introduction.

Prayer ideas

Most outlines contain two creative ways of praying, one of which will be static, word-based and simpler, while the other may involve movement. Sometimes these will require preparation beforehand, for example, creating prayer stations and providing objects or materials for people to use.

The prayers can be led by one or more voices, and handing the ideas to a family or a prayer group so they can prepare can be a good way of developing skills and involving more people in leading intercessions. Sometimes the prayers involve movement, and it is a good idea to have one person directing and modelling the movements while someone else says the words. If the prayer activity involves people moving around the worship space, it is helpful to play suitable music. This could be played by a worship group or organist, but it is also an opportunity to use recorded music. This needs to be selected with care. If there are lyrics, then they will need to complement the prayer focus rather than distract, and the mood of the piece needs to complement the mood of the prayers. If people are being encouraged to think about sadness, then

blasting out 'Oh Lord, I wanna sing your praises' is jarring but, equally, playing a haunting melody when the focus is on praying for joy in various situations may be distracting.

Although this book contains different ideas and approaches for each month, in reality you will find that certain approaches to prayer work well in specific contexts. Some congregations find prayer stations impossible, others really enjoy them. Likewise some worship leaders find they have a gift for encouraging movement in prayer, whereas others find the use of objects to be helpful. Doing something new and exciting every time is not the key to good inclusive worship, so don't feel obliged to keep introducing different ideas. Find a few ways that work and stick with them for a while, then maybe introduce something different for a special occasion.

If the service is a service of the word, it is appropriate to end the prayers with the Lord's Prayer.

The peace

Although not essential in a non-eucharistic service, exchanging the peace is a lovely moment of inclusion and acknowledging that we are gathered as the whole people of God. Various words can be used to introduce the peace, but the formal words 'the peace of the Lord be always with you' must be included and said by an authorized minister.

We celebrate

There are no specific suggestions offered in the outlines for the Eucharist, although it is recommended that in the Church of England, Prayer D from *Common Worship*⁶ be used (or one of the new eucharistic prayers for use with children present, once authorized) and that thought be given to the mechanics of distribution as well as the prayers.

It is also good to involve children and adults together in bringing the gifts to the altar and also in preparing the table. A hymn is usually sung while this is happening, and it needs to be of sufficient length to allow for all the activity to take place.

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Jesus', accompanied by drums, clowns, balloons and song.

In other parts of the world, and in other faiths, colour and movement are an integral part of religious life. Festivals almost always involve some kind of public procession, accompanied by crowds, whether moving in sadness or joy. A friend recently visited Sri Lanka, and described the extraordinary festival of Kandy Perahera, a solemn Buddhist tradition. As the procession moved through the streets, those working in shops or chatting in cafés simply stopped and stood for a moment as it went by. The festival has an impact on society as well as on those taking part, yet our Christian milestones seem to have become private affairs, in spite of their huge importance.

The difference between the kind of festivals now flourishing in society and those outlined in Scripture and handed down in the tradition of the Church is

Christian festivals are not about entertainment (although there may well be lots of fun and laughter), nor even about education (though we may be discovering new things about God's involvement with the world)

that our festivals are a re-enactment of sacred stories. Christian festivals are not about entertainment (although there may well be lots of fun and laughter), nor even about education (though we may be discovering new things about God's involvement with the world). Sometimes

they will be joyful occasions, at other times they will involve recalling moments of pain and failure, but whatever the theme the intention is that everyone will be involved. They allow us an opportunity to enter into the events that stand at the heart of our history and our faith and help create a space in which people of all ages have the possibility of encountering God.

Worship with whoever is present

Festivals are genuinely worship for all ages or, as I often call it these days, worship for whoever is present. It is not dependent on the presence of children to make it happen, but will truly have the

potential to allow everyone from nought to one hundred the possibility of worship and encounter. Yet there seems to be something strangely paralysing about the words 'all age' to our churches, with its understood subtext of 'Oh my goodness, that means there will be children there! What are we going to do?' Yet week in, week out, year in, year out, the Church holds worship that engages a wide range of different needs and life experiences, without anyone getting too worked up about it. We don't worry about a congregation with some young professionals in their thirties (for some

of us that would be positively exciting!) alongside the residents from a local care home plus the regulars who are between 65 and 90 years old. Somehow we trust the words of worship, the Scriptures and the prayers to connect with life. All our worship is for all ages: children are simply part of the mix. There may be occasions when we want to have special events for them or reflect on things that are clearly adult, but our festivals should be for everyone.

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The Hebrew Scriptures lay down guidelines for the commemoration of significant events in Jewish history, and it is clear throughout that there is a great deal of drama and participation by the people. The festival of booths (Leviticus 23.42; Nehemiah 8.13–18) always sounds like a great occasion, with people working together to build huts out of branches, then camping in them for a week, before holding the solemn assembly. The festival of Purim, which recounts the story of Esther, is also a marvellous occasion for family involvement, with much cheering and laughing throughout. However, it is not just the happy times which are 'for the children'. There are occasions when the people of God are called together for moments of high solemnity, such as the dedication of the temple or to be called to account for all that has gone wrong: 'Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the