

Guidance for Collective Worship In Church Schools



The Importance of Collective Worship in the Church School

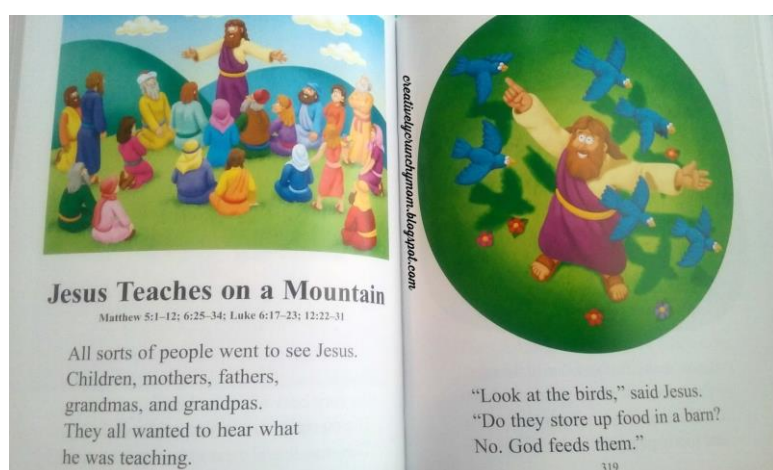
Collective Worship is fundamental to the Christian foundation of a Church of England school. In worship the school community shares a quality experience, central to the life of the school and to its religious character. **As such an act of collective worship is fundamentally different to an assembly in a community school.**

The Church school is an important part of the work and mission of the parish. The school should celebrate close connections with the local parish and worshipping community, and enjoy its support and encouragement. In the same way, a good Church school will contribute to the life of the worshipping community.

Worship, therefore, has the potential to contribute to the nurture of personal faith, to develop the spiritual and religious awareness of all present and to contribute to the Diocesan Strategy.

It is vital to recognise that pupils in Church schools come from a variety of backgrounds, reflecting the pluralistic and secular nature of modern British society.

Whilst the Christian context will be explicit in Church schools, the overall pattern should be collective rather than corporate, as shared beliefs and values cannot be assumed. The use of the term 'collective' is important in that it recognises that children and staff will subscribe to a range of beliefs and non-religious worldviews. There is a need for the Church school to provide opportunities for all to share in worship in a way that makes sense to them and is appropriate to their individual stage of development.



Collective Worship must seek to be inclusive, being interpreted in a way that is meaningful to the range of communities served by schools. Given the educational context of collective worship, raising knowledge and awareness of others and offering opportunity for reflection on 'big

questions' within the context of worship, is important. This will enable the possibility of the worship being intrinsic to school life. A definition of collective worship in this context should also incorporate an atmosphere in which God can be spoken about naturally and without apology.

The Legal Requirements for Collective Worship in Church Schools

The **School Standards and Framework Act 1998** (Section 70 and Schedule 20) requires:

- All registered pupils (apart from those whose parents exercise the right to withdrawal) must on "each school day take part in an act of Collective Worship." This is also the case in schools without a religious character.
- The daily act of collective worship in a Church school should be conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Trust Deed of the school and the school's ethos statement or, where it is not stated within the Trust Deed, should be consistent with the beliefs and practices of the Church of England.
- For collective worship, pupils can be grouped in various ways: as a whole school, according to age, or in groups (or a combination of groups) used by the school at other times.
- The daily act of collective worship will normally take place on the school premises. Schools are, however, permitted to hold their acts of Collective Worship elsewhere (e.g. the local parish church, in the school grounds).
- Responsibility for the oversight of collective worship rests with the governors in consultation with the headteacher. Foundation governors have a particular responsibility to ensure that the character or foundation of the school is reflected in Collective Worship.



Collective Worship is **not designated curriculum time** under law and should not be subsumed under any part of the curriculum. The act of Collective Worship must be distinctive and identifiable if it is to meet the legal requirements. **Collective Worship time should not be used as 'intervention time'** as this would result in pupils not receiving their legal entitlement to worship provision.

Parental Rights

The rights of parents to withdraw their children from collective worship established in the 1944 Act remain unchanged. Parents also retain this right in the particular context of Church schools. This means that:

Exercising the Right of Withdrawal

The school's arrangements for collective worship and the rights of parents to withdraw their children should be clearly outlined in the school prospectus or equivalent document.

If a parent asks that a pupil should be wholly or partly excused from attending collective worship at a school, **the school must comply**.

Parents are not obliged to state their reasons for seeking withdrawal. A headteacher will, however, find it helpful to understand:

- the element(s) of collective worship in which the parent would object to the child taking part
- the practical implications of withdrawal, and
- whether the parent will require any advanced notice of such worship, and if so how much.

A school continues to be responsible for the supervision of any child withdrawn from collective worship.

A Recommended Structure for Collective Worship

The central attributes of collective worship in a Church school can be integrated effectively by following the fourfold structure of **Gathering, Engaging, Responding and Sending**.

Gathering- Making special and significant this part of the day through appropriate symbol and ceremony

Engaging - Using the best available techniques to stimulate interest in the content

Responding - Ensuring there is time and opportunity for individual, group reflection and thought, so those attending can respond in a variety of ways

Sending - Summarising the worship in a meaningful short message used to create an opportunity for those attending to implement the ideas covered and to conclude the worship

Some gathering ideas:

- Teach a short prayerful song
- Light a candle with a prayer or greeting such as 'Peace be with you....and also with you'
- Use an inspirational or thought provoking image on screen as children arrive
- Use music, playing while the children arrive, that links to the theme
- Create a sense of ceremony – a tealight in a special holder is lit in the classroom, the light is processed at the front of the class as they walk to the worship space. As the school gathers all the lights are placed at the front of the hall and a main candle is lit.
- Instead of the children forming rows in their classes, the children arrive and create vertical rows from front to back. This mixes up the classes and creates a more family feel with older and younger children sitting next to each other
- Try to create as much of a circle as possible, in Godly Play it is described as the children's sacred space. It brings the children closer and creates a more intimate feel to the assembly of people
- Get a child to process the school banner accompanied by two candle bearers to the front when all classes are assembled
- Start a Taize chant or other short repeating song in the classrooms and bring the song to the hall
- Ask the children, explain that Gathering is a key part of our school worship, what would make it special for them
- Vary the gathering each half term – the gathering can reflect the cycle of the church year

Some engaging ideas:

Gathering provided you with the first opportunity to raise the curiosity of those assembled. The imagery, the music, perhaps the fragrance you used (burning an incense stick) can be used to start the engagement:

- Ask questions about the image / music / fragrance
- Find out what the children already know. We sometimes tell a Bible story that most of the children know quite well. Rather than reading or telling it again, get the children to help you retell the story, their own words can provide you with profound insights
- Tell a story from your own life or childhood which relates to a Bible story

- Try to be creative in bringing stories to life for children, through drawings, music, volunteers, props , images, clips, interesting objects, symbols
- Try to internalize stories so that you can tell them engagingly without reading them directly from the page
- Talk to your vicar / lay ministers about Bible telling resources such as “Open The Book”, a dramatic way of telling Bible stories that involves adults and children
- Consider sometimes sitting on the floor at the children’s level, talk in a low voice so everyone has to work hard to hear

Some responding ideas:

- When you ask a question, responding can be:
 - think about this in your head
 - talk to the person beside you (talking partner), give the children 20 seconds and then swap partner
 - gathering an answer from year R then year 1, year 2 and so on
 - holding your answer in your head and see if you had the right idea as the story continues
 - expecting the unexpected and allowing for obscure responses
- Responding can be quiet – is this your preferred style? What will work best for the subject / children?
- Responding can be noisy – is this your preferred style? Can you successfully restore calm?
- Responding can be allowing the children to tell the story for / with you
- If you are using a well-known Biblical story, rather than telling it all yourself ask the children what comes next, this is both engaging and responding
- Can the response be an action rather than words? How can you show compassion to this person, show me in a mime?
- The response could be a spontaneous prayer said out loud to a partner or to everyone
- Singing an appropriate song may be an appropriate way of responding

- Responding might be private as we all listen to a piece of music or look at an image or at a candle flame
- A collective response might be asking what we can do as a school to make a difference in the context of the theme, gathering the ideas and offering them to the school leadership might be appropriate
- Asking the children to show work that they have done in class the week before, you have to set this up in advance

Some sending or concluding ideas:

- Sending or the conclusion should be your starting point for every worship. Always ask yourself “What do I want the children / adults to take away?”
- “What impact do I want the content of the worship to have on the lives of the children and adults?”
- Some sending may be personal to the individual and some may be outward to others and involve a school wide response
- Use a final prayer to sow the seed you want – make sure that the language you use can be understood by children of all ages present
- Empower the children “Remember, although you might be small or very young compared to us adults, you can change the world by what you do today”
- Reference the way you gathered the children “Dear God, show us who you are and how you want us to be.” As you leave today, what have you learned about how God wants human beings to be. Does it affect you?
- Ask them to think how they treat others while they work, play in school and how they behave
- Ask them to be courageous in defending others in class against unkindness
- Ask them to spot others being kind and be courageous enough to tell them
- Ask them to organise a chart in class to catch all the times when kindnesses are spotted
- Ask them to look out for a charity that might need support

- ask them to think of ways in which the school could help others in the local or world community
- Ask the children what they think the sending message should be today

Responsibilities of Governors

Governing bodies of Church of England schools and academies, and foundation governors in particular, have a special responsibility for ensuring that the Christian character of the school is secured and developed and that the school is run in accordance with its trust deed and the ethos statement which appears on its Instrument of Government. Therefore, it is a governor responsibility to ensure that collective worship is conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Trust Deed of the school or, where it is not stated within the Trust Deed, should be consistent with the beliefs and practices of the Church of England.

This responsibility will be enabled through appropriate monitoring and evaluation of collective worship.



Responsibilities of the Diocesan Board of Education

The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) is kept fully informed of all matters relating to collective worship in Diocesan schools. Through the receipt of Section 48 reports, the DBE monitors the provision of Collective Worship in all Diocesan schools and academies within its jurisdiction.

What is the Difference between Corporate and Collective Worship?

Corporate Worship assumes a single shared set of beliefs within the context of a specific faith community, e.g. Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Sikh.

Collective Worship recognises the collective nature and diverse beliefs and opinions of those present. Worship should be offered in such a way that all those present, regardless of faith or worldview stance, can feel comfortable and welcome to participate in the experience being offered. Collective worship does not pre-suppose shared beliefs, and should not seek uniform responses from pupils. Collective worship caters for a diversity of beliefs and points of view, allowing individuals to respond as individuals.

Christian Beliefs and Collective Worship in Church Schools

There should always be an awareness of the theological underpinning of collective worship.

Collective worship should:

- contribute to learners' understanding of Christian theological concepts and beliefs at an appropriate level
- reflect the Trinitarian nature of Christianity
- give the Bible a significant place in worship. (See SIAMS inspection schedule)

The Bible

Acts of collective worship should regularly incorporate stories from the Bible as an aid to reflection and deeper understanding of human experience. The Anglican Church follows a liturgical calendar (<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/the-liturgical-year.aspx>), which specifies biblical passages for particular times of the year and schools may wish to incorporate these readings into their own acts of worship as and when appropriate.

Prayer in Church Schools and Academies

Opportunities for prayer and reflection are central to worship, not only in the daily act of collective worship, but also throughout the school day e.g. before lunch, at the end of the day, at indoor and outdoor reflection areas. Prayer boxes, prayer trees and prayer walls are examples of where pupils and staff can interact individually or collectively and respond to something they are considering at any given time e.g.

an item in the news, a personal situation, a situation involving a friend, a festival occasion, a 'big question'.

Prayer can take many forms. It can be collective, personal, formal, created by the pupils themselves, silent, meditational, sung and spoken.

Children in Church schools and academies should have the opportunity to know and offer the Lord's Prayer on a regular basis.



(There is a separate document on prayer in church schools on the diocesan website)

Collective Worship and the Anglican Practice

Schools often ask what is meant by 'Anglican Tradition or Practice' as this is an area frequently mentioned in inspection reports. The Anglican Church is often described as a very broad church, which means that there is a wide variety of ways used to 'be Anglican'. In England the Anglican Church is often called the Church of England. Anglicans have always combined their belief in the authority of Scripture with a respect for traditions, some of which include:

The Bible - the Holy Scriptures of Christianity, 'The Word of God', divided into the Old and New Testaments - as a source book for inspiration, themes and stories

The Creeds - statements of belief used by nearly all Christian Churches - a summary of what Christians believe about God - 'I believe.....'

The Sacraments – Such as Baptism and Holy Communion (Eucharist) both of which Jesus instructed us to do

Liturgy - any ordered act of worship

Seasons/Calendar - the cycle of the Church's Year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Saints Days

Prayer - time for reflection, time for silence, time for awe and wonder, traditional prayers, The Lord's Prayer, The Grace

Vestments - religious robes as symbols of spiritual significance, including liturgical colours

Symbols - including cross, candles, bread and wine, incense, making the sign of the cross, the lamb of God

Icon - a religious picture, statue or structure intended to help people pray

Music - to praise God, to pray, to reflect

Sentences - The Lord is here / His Spirit is with us; Peace be with you / and also with you, etc.



Diversity and Inclusive Language

Particular care should be taken to ensure that in acts of collective worship, diversity is embraced in positive and sensitive ways through:

- Building up positive relationships with families and local faith communities
- Encouraging pupils to be present at acts of collective worship but ensuring that pupils from other faiths and their parents are aware that they will not be required to say Christian prayers should they choose not to do so
- Providing opportunities for silent reflection to enable all pupils to make a personal response
- Developing a sense of shared values and achievements which cross cultural and religious boundaries
- Respecting the integrity of different faiths and life stances

Church schools should offer the opportunity to encounter the spiritual, providing opportunity for powerful and meaningful experience within the context of daily life in the school community. The school's approach to collective worship should be sensitive to the needs and backgrounds of the communities it serves. It should also be noted, however, that the integrity of the Church school should be maintained whilst acknowledging and observing a sensitive approach to those who do not adhere to the Christian faith.

Acts of worship may include materials from faiths other than Christianity when these materials are relevant and especially when children from those other faiths are present. Careful use of hospitable and inclusive language can enable a diverse school community to worship collectively as one worshipping community.

Ethos and Values

Governors and staff should reflect on ways in which acts of collective worship might be used to promote values as an expression of their distinctive Christian ethos.

Many Church schools select a set of core Christian values, often incorporated into a school's mission statement or vision, as an expression of what the school community deems to be important. Where acts of collective worship are planned to provide educational opportunities for exploring these values, collective worship will be consistent with the school's ethos.

In Church schools it will be vital that a distinctively Christian understanding of these shared common human values will be explored.

Collective Worship and Spiritual Development

Whilst opportunities for spiritual development should be fostered across the whole curriculum, acts of collective worship provide particular opportunities for promoting the spiritual development of pupils. Although spirituality is at the heart of all the world's major religions, the spiritual area of experience cannot be confined to adherents of faith communities. In approaching Collective Worship, schools should acknowledge and respect pupils and staff with non-religious worldviews offering opportunity for spiritual and educational reflection and personal development.



Such an approach to spiritual development might include:

- the recognition that there is something more to life than the ordinary
 - acknowledging the capacity of pupils to reach beyond the everyday experiences of life
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- giving time for stillness and reflection, and the exploration of inner thoughts and feelings
 - providing opportunities for pupils to share what is important to them
 - celebrating what is worthwhile in pupils' own lives and in the context of the school and wider community

Developing a policy for Collective Worship

Governors and staff should agree a whole school policy for collective worship. The policy should set out the school's shared understanding of collective worship and its place in the life of the school community. The policy should clearly articulate links between collective worship and the school's identity and distinctive ethos, and the contribution of collective worship to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

The policy should indicate the methods, planning, recording and evaluating acts of collective worship.

A statement of the overall purpose of collective worship expressed as an aim, or aims, will enable schools to place collective worship within an overall educational framework.

Monitoring and evaluation of **impact** in the whole school context will provide an essential dimension to the overall delivery of the distinctiveness and effectiveness of worship at the school.

(An example policy document can be found on the diocesan website.)

Visitors Contributing to or Delivering Acts of Collective Worship

Visitors can enrich the experience of school collective worship. Visitors need to be aware of the combination of the educational and worship components required within the context of the school or academy.

Before the specific collective worship is to be delivered, school and visitor should discuss the purpose of the visit and ensure that the amount of time available, the ages and backgrounds of the pupils and the context of the contribution are all fully understood by both the school and the visitor.



Planning for Collective Worship

A named individual (or post) should be recognised as having responsibility for the planning of collective worship across the school. The governing body must be aware of the requirements for the delivery of the school worship plan. It is best practice for schools to include pupils in the planning, delivery and evaluation of worship.

A collective worship group can comprise the collective worship co-ordinator for the school alongside pupils and other staff representatives and, whenever possible, the church representatives involved in worship delivery. Foundation governors have a key role in ensuring the quality of worship and its **impact** on the school community. The headteacher might seek to be involved, or to lead this group, but there is no requirement for that to be the case.

Planning should ensure that a variety of approaches are used to fulfil the policy and aims for collective worship, including the provision of appropriate learning opportunities.

Schools often find it helpful to take a thematic approach to planning. Used appropriately, themes can provide an overall, structured planning framework whilst not restricting creativity, flexibility and spontaneity.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A continuous process of monitoring, review and evaluation is integral to school improvement and a simple record of collective worship evaluation should be developed. This should assist with the review of provision and help with future planning whilst also providing evidence of meeting the legal requirements.

Ideally monitoring and evaluation should be undertaken by staff, governors and pupils. The following evidence might usefully be included:

- documentation, e.g. policy, planning, records and evaluations
- observations of acts of collective worship as part of routine monitoring activity
- discussions with foundation governors (and possibly other interested governors), collective worship co-ordinator, staff, pupils and, if appropriate, parents
- discussions with representatives of the parish community, local community and local faith communities and, as requested, diocesan representatives
- Collective worship resources including budget allocation and expenditure.

Example monitoring forms can be found on the diocesan website.

Links between school, parish and the wider ecumenical community

The quality of collective worship in church schools can be significantly enhanced through the development of partnerships with the parish church and wider community. The distinctive relationship between school and local worshipping community provides a range of resources

through which members of both communities can be supported in their spiritual growth and development.

In most schools there will be strong and mutually supportive links with the local parish church, but in some situations links with an ecumenical partner will enable a more realistic outcome. Where there is opportunity, it is valuable to develop positive working links with a range of different Christian denominations.

(A diocesan leaflet outlining some ideas for schools and parishes, 'That's A Good Idea', is available on the diocesan website.)

Some useful resources to support collective worship

ELBOURNE, T (2016) **How to Craft Collective Worship** pub. Grove Books

BROWN, A (2017) **How to see Collective Worship Anew** pub. Grove Books

HARTMAN, B (2015) **Telling the Bible** pub. Lion/Hudson

HARTMAN, B (2013) **The Storyteller Bible** pub. Lion/Hudson

HARTMAN, B (2015) **Telling the Gospel** pub. Lion/Hudson

HARTMAN, B (2013) **Bible Stories Through the Year** pub. Lion/Hudson

NICHOLLS, R (2007) **The Year in colour – Primary Assemblies for Christian Festivals and Seasons** pub. Kevin Mayhew

PARKINSON, R (2016) **10-MINUTE Assemblies for 4-11s – 50 ready-to-use assemblies exploring values from the Christian perspective** pub. for Barnabas in Schools by The Bible Reading Fellowship

PRITCHARD HOUSTON, M (2013) **There is a Season – celebrating the church year with children** pub. SPCK

VICKERY, S et al (2006) **Values for Life** pub. Jumping Fish

BRISTOW, R (2012) **Prayer in Schools** pub. Grove Books

www.barnabasinschools.org.uk

[*Open the Book*](#)

[*Prayer Spaces in Schools*](#)

<http://www.prayforschools.org>

[*Worship Workshop*](#)

www.happeningscards.co.uk