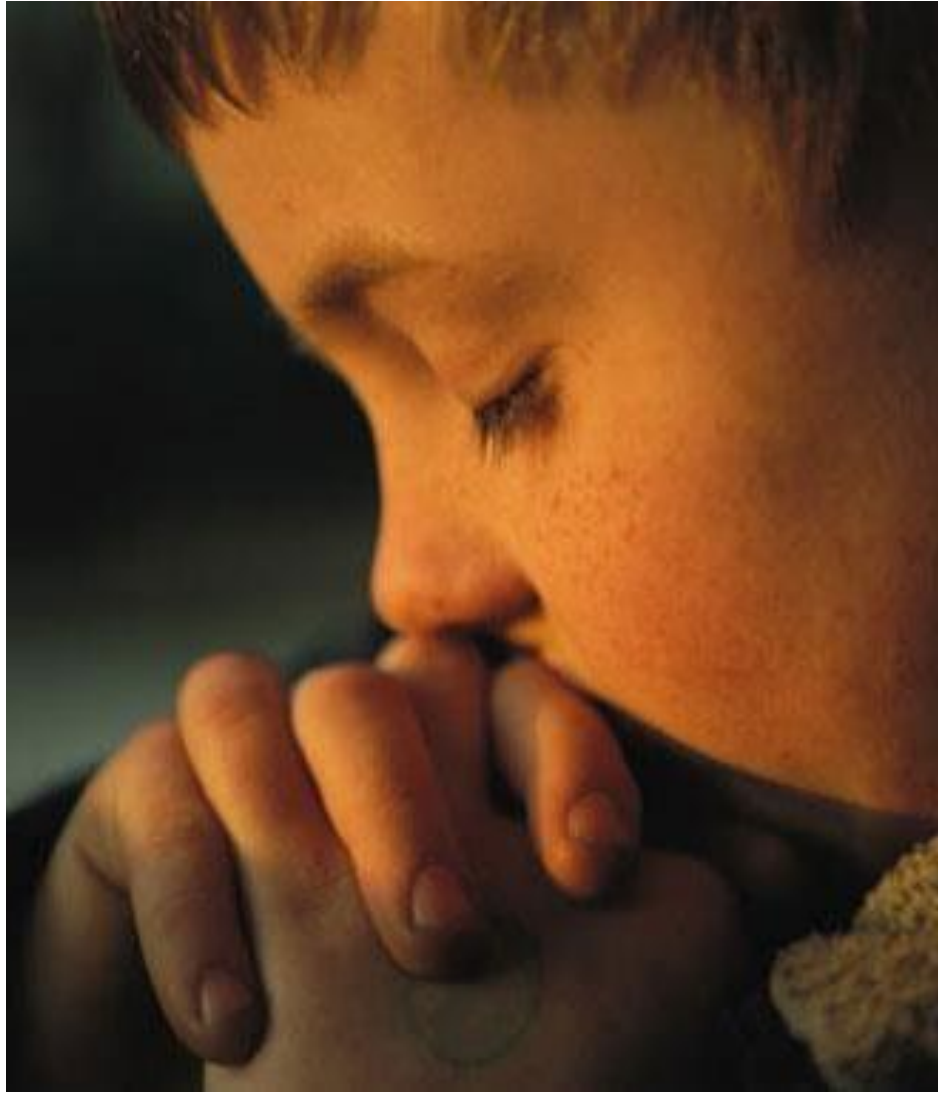


Invitational prayer

Prayer and Reflection



Advice to support schools

May 2017

Introduction

Collective worship provides an opportunity for the whole school community to pause and reflect on important issues of life and faith. Prayer is a central part of this worship and in church schools it should underpin the ethos and life of the school.

Of course church schools do not solely educate children and young people from Christian family backgrounds. They exist to serve the communities in which they are situated. Our school communities offer great diversity and vitality, welcoming those of all faiths and none. **Christian worship in our schools should therefore be invitational** and school leaders should meet the challenge of leading collective worship within their diverse communities with integrity and respect.

Prayer

Prayer is a form of expression with a long and complex history. The language of prayer and the ways in which prayer plays a part in worship and personal devotion, have varied and developed according to era and context. As children (and adults) develop their understanding and expression of faith a growing appreciation of the breadth of prayer, including the writing (creating) of prayer, is essential in their spiritual development.



Why reflect?

In schools both adults and children live in an increasingly busy and demanding world. When people encounter the opportunity for quiet they often find it challenging or even uncomfortable. The Gospels highlight how Jesus took time to withdraw and find place and space to talk with God.

‘Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of the town to a lonely place, where he prayed.’ Mark 1:35.

Within this context, reflection often involves an inward journey from an outward stimulus. This journey may then lead to purposeful change. Reflection and prayer may be interchangeable for each individual as they make their own personal response.

Worship and belief

Any form of prayer needs a context, for example, when we say 'thank you', what are we saying 'thank you' *for*? Who are we saying thank you *to*? Worship can provide that context. It lays out the beliefs of the school and the expectations of its members.



It is important for schools not to assume that the 'beliefs of the school' and the 'beliefs of its members' are the same. It is the expectations that should match. As a church school, it is expected that at times the school will be 'prayerful' or 'at prayer' but within this the expressions will depend on both the faith of the individuals and their experience of the nature of prayer and praying. In this way prayer is invitational, not compulsory.

SIAMs inspection requirements

In the current SIAMs framework, inspectors visiting a school will need to verify:

The **centrality of prayer and reflection** and the extent to which:

- a. learners understand the nature and purpose of prayer and reflection
- b. learners understand the part this may play within an individual's life and in the life of the worshipping community
- c. prayer contributes to the spiritual development of the whole school community
- d. appropriate opportunities are provided for prayer and other worship activities, such as Christian reflection, outside collective worship

The criteria for an outstanding judgement includes:

Learners understand the value of personal prayer and reflection as part of their own spiritual journey. They seek out opportunities for this in their own lives and contribute confidently and sensitively to prayer in worship.

[Provision for prayer in schools](#)

In each school there are often three opportunities to create reflective spaces:

1. The main collective worship area is traditionally the hall. This will generally be a focal point when the whole school community gathers for collective worship.
2. The school entrance hall and corridors are thoroughfares where people can use interactive areas to pause and reflect.
3. Classroom spaces can have specific areas for reflection and quiet thought.

[Questions to consider when creating prayer spaces](#)

Who are the intended users of this space?

How will the space be used?

Will it be open access?

How will it be supervised?

How will it be introduced to the children?

Who is responsible for looking after the space?

Is it a permanent feature or a moveable feast?

How will it be funded?

How is the place and space created? Whose ideas?

Governors? Head teacher?

Staff? Children? Clergy?

Where could reflective space be developed in the school?

Does the space encourage interaction?

Does the space engage the senses and the imagination?

For more information on creating areas for prayer and reflection, visit

www.prayerspacesinschools.com

For ideas of how to introduce interactive prayer activities, follow the link below.

[Creative Prayer Ideas](#)



Mindfulness and Christian Meditation

Mindfulness and Christian Meditation are both widely practised in schools and have much in common. Through the meditation practices of Mindfulness and Christian Meditation some children can find a way of stabilising these special moments of peace and integrating them into daily life. There are a range of meditation and mindfulness courses for school staff to attend. For some school staff who have followed a Mindfulness course it may be important to develop this practice in a way which acknowledges the spiritual. Schools may choose to do this through Christian Meditation. Further information is available from:

www.christianmeditation.org.uk

<https://mindfulnessinschools.org/>

A Note on Confession

The idea of confession is an aspect of prayer for Christians. It reflects an understanding of the 'fallenness' of the human condition. There are a multitude of understandings about 'the fall' in Christianity bound with the concept of sin, its origin and the work of Christ in 'saving from sin'.



For people who are not Christians the idea of little children having to 'confess' or say 'sorry' to God can be difficult. Non-Christian adults (and some Christian ones) find the whole idea of confession challenging. Not usually in itself, but because it implies that children are somehow 'sinful' or 'wrong' in themselves. The very idea that Christianity suggests that little children are 'sinful' can be a reason for some to reject faith.

There are good reasons for encouraging children to be morally reflective and for including this reflection in their prayers. Indeed the Lord's Prayer has a confessional aspect, but the prayer binds God's forgiveness to our own willingness to forgive. The Lord's Prayer also has as its context the words of Jesus concerning forgiveness.

Schools are advised to allow children to develop their understanding of confessional aspects of prayer as they grow. Part of this will be to encourage exploration of confession through Bible stories.

What schools must avoid is the coercion of children into a Christian confessional - this moves, critically, from collective worship to corporate worship which is inappropriate in a school setting.

