introduction and ethos

introduction

At the beginning of 2009 a conversation began amongst a couple, then a few, then a group about collaboratively creating resources that enabled us to tell the story of faith in a worship context and within age groups for younger people and teens. Spill the Beans was born as the result of that conversation and has grown and developed over the intervening years.

The ethos has remained the same, however. It's all about story. For we believe story is the lifeblood of faith. In story we can tell the truth and speak with honesty about things for which there are not yet words. Story contains mystery and is the poetry that forms faith. Stories grow as we grow and can reveal new truths at different times in our lives.

So we believe giving stories to people is one of the most important things we can do in sharing our faith. Children and adults hold stories in their being and keep coming back to them throughout life. Our culture is stored in story. The same is true for our faith.

Narrative Lectionary

Over the course of 2011-2014 the Spill the Beans Resource Team completed a full cycle through the Revised Common Lectionary. As we neared the end of that cycle we began discussion about what to do once we had completed that cycle. We considered the pros and cons of remaining with the RCL for another cycle or trying a different tack. We have decided, in a spirit of continual experimentation, to journey with the Narrative Lectionary which began a new four year cycle in September 2014. In this issue we complete the third year of the Narrative Lectionary cycle.

Note that a set of previous issues (1-12) which covered a cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary is available to purchase.

The Narrative Lectionary is a relatively new four year lectionary that focuses on story and retelling the broad sweep of the biblical narrative in each year. We felt that this focus has a natural resonance with the ethos of Spill the Beans. It is a little experimental and has the feel of a new adventure.

Why have we decided to do this? To fully understand this you need to know that Spill the Beans is a work of love. None of the contributors are paid for their contributions, these contributions are written and prepared with our own congregations in mind. Instead of working in isolation, we bring this work together, give it some spit and polish, and share it with others. This is how we can keep the cost so low.

Many of the team were attracted to the freshness of the different approach taken by the NL and see it as a means of sparking new ideas and experiences for our congregations.

We pray you will also be enthused and enlivened by a new approach within worship and in your age groups, engaging with the great biblical narrative so that all people will let these stories shape their own story of faith.

spilling the beans

In this 23rd issue of Spill the Beans you will find an extensive collection of things to use each week. Each piece is written with specific congregations in mind rather than some average congregation. Thus there may be the need to be a little creative yourselves in adapting and evolving some of the ideas to suit your own place and culture and congregation. That is a good thing.

Of course, if you are creative and you'd like to share what you have done, then we have a place for that on our blog (http://spillbeans.org.uk) and Facebook page http://www.facebook.com/spillbeansresources. There you will find PowerPoint backgrounds for most weeks, a live discussion of the passages for that week and how we might be able to adapt and recreate what has been suggested.

These are a few ideas that possibly expand upon the story offering words, phrases, poetry and ideas that could be used in some way in worship. We encourage you not to use these exactly as they are but rather edit, expand and enmesh these ideas within the culture of your own faith community.

Each week we provide a selection of words, ideas and creative moments to take the theme and the passage a little further. We do not provide a ready made service or perfect prayers but ideas and pointers that hopefully scratch at your own creativity and provoke heaven's imagination within you.

Here are some helpful tips to guide you in your use of the material in age groups:

1. It presumes some introduction to the story will have taken place in worship together or will play a part in the service when children join it later.
2. Depending on the make-up of your own groups of children you will need to remain flexible in how you use the material.
3. Each idea has been given a guide age range to help your planning, but this is only a guide so use your own judgement about what will work with your group.
4. Before the sit-down activities if you have a group of young children or lots of boys, you may want to add a run-around type game to expend some energy.
5. Use the gathering time exercise with the whole group to get into the story together across the ages.
6. We encourage you to retell the story together.
7. Follow that by choosing as many or as few activities your space and time allow. You could offer a number of activities each at different stations all at the same time for all ages to self-select with a teacher staffing each one, or have traditional classes.
8. During activities, ask children to retell the story to you and ask about their week, what was happy and what was sad and if this week's story reminds them of other biblical and personal stories.
9. The intention is not to complete “the tasks” brilliantly, but rather to provide opportunities to begin conversations, build relationships, retell the story of the day, and talk about what it means for us today.
10. There are many websites that provide handout-type sheets that will have images, crosswords and wordsearches for the story of that week. They can be helpful in an emergency, but try to be more creative as leaders, the rewards are worth it.
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Please remember you can use the bookmark system within Adobe Reader to quickly move around this document.

spill the beans resource team

For more information and extra materials, join us on the Spill the Beans blog: http://spillbeans.org.uk or join the community at http://www.facebook.com/spillbeansresources.

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Key to Abbreviations

In the worship ideas section the following abbreviations may be used to indicate different sources of worship music:

ATAS  All the Assembly Songs You’ll Ever Need
CG    Common Ground
CH4   Church Hymnary, 4th Edition
CH3   Church Hymnary, 3rd Edition
JP    Junior Praise
MP    Complete Mission Praise
SGP   Songs of God’s People
WGP   Wild Goose Publications
through the season

Introduction

In this section you will find some ideas for scene-setting activities and a weekly focus as you move through the season. These ideas provide possible ways of linking all the weeks together which can be a helpful reminder to people of the thread of the story and the key aspects being focused on during worship.

This edition of Spill the Beans takes us through what we DO in church, what it means to BE church and leads us into celebrating the two Sacraments that the majority of the reformed church practises. Some of what is suggested here might require adaptation to your own setting, especially if you come from a tradition that practices other sacraments.

The gathering activities suggested each week are detailed here and within the weekly chapters for simplicity.

If you have the facilities for projection there is a suggestion for what kind of image could be projected as people arrive. Or if you prefer a physical installation you could produce large copies of the suggested image and have this somewhere people can see. Each week you could add the next image alongside the previous images to build up a portfolio recording your journey through this theme.

Week By Week

Doing Church

11 June  Trinity
Story: Psalm 100
Title: Joy
Image: A big smile emoji
Action: Give everyone a party blower or party popper as they come in. This is for using at the end of the Call to Worship.

18 June  Pentecost 2
Story: Psalm 13
Title: How long?
Image: Praying hands
Action: Have business sized cards for each person with a short prayer on each. You can either make your own or use something like the Pray it Forward cards from the Church of Scotland’s Mission & Discipleship Council (https://www.resourcingmission.org.uk/shop/pray-it-forward-cards-2016) Encourage people to use this prayer as they wait for worship to begin. These could be gathered in during the first hymn and either as worship progresses have someone quietly building a wall with the ‘bricks’ or they could be built into a wall ready to for next week.

OR give everyone a ‘Lego’ brick (or similar building blocks) and invite them to add their brick to an already half built ‘Lego’ church at the front of the church.

OR uses shoeboxes and build a bigger structure that will be the focal installation for the next few weeks.

25 June  Pentecost 3
Story: Psalm 23
Title: Following the Shepherd
Image: Shepherd (modern or ancient)
Action: Give everyone a ball of cotton wool as they enter the church. At an appropriate time invite them to come forward and stick their ball of cotton wool to a large piece of card, creating together a collage-style sheep.

2 July  Pentecost 4
Story: Psalm 30
Title: Thanksgiving
Image: Praying hands (as per Pentecost 2)
Action: Give everyone a Post-It note and make sure there are pencils or pens available. Encourage people to write down something or someone for whom they are grateful. During the first hymn these could be gathered in and placed somewhere suitable (for example on the Communion Table or at a foot of a cross).

9 July  Pentecost 5
Story: Psalm 150
Title: Music
Image: An orchestra/band
Action: Hand out simple percussion instruments to people as they gather (these could be very simple such as crisp tubes with some rice inside, plastic cups with dried beans, or some cheap store-bought items, even kazoos or party blowers. Let people have free rein over when they would like to join in the worship with their instruments.

Being Church

The suggested actions are aimed at getting people to mix and mingle, perhaps speaking to people that, although they worship alongside one another, may not know each other that well. Or in a smaller setting where people know each other well, they may learn something new about their fellow worshippers.

16 July  Pentecost 6
Story: Ephesians 1:1-14
Title: One with Christ
Image: Photo/image of your church building
Action: Give everyone a paper ‘brick’; an A5 sheet of paper would do but print these to look like bricks. Invite people to decorate their bricks (or simply write their names on them) as they wait for worship to begin. These could be gathered in during the first hymn and either as worship progresses have someone quietly building a wall with the ‘bricks’ or they could be built into a wall ready to for next week.

OR give everyone a ‘Lego’ brick (or similar building blocks) and invite them to add their brick to an already half built ‘Lego’ church at the front of the church.

OR uses shoeboxes and build a bigger structure that will be the focal installation for the next few weeks.
23 July Pentecost 7
Story: Ephesians 2:11-22
Title: Diversity in Unity
Image: Same image as previous week
Action: To celebrate the diversity of everyone present, invite them to play People Bingo. This will involve preparing a sheet with 12 different things that people might not know about each other, for example: like crime fiction, has a cat, has a dog, has a tattoo, has been to city. The idea is to mingle and find people that meet each category. With some inside knowledge you could include some quite ‘unique’ categories. Include all ages in this activity.

OR, if you began building a church in the previous week, let people add another brick this week.

30 July Pentecost 8
Story: Ephesians 4:1-16
Title: One Body
Image: Same image as previous week
Action: Give every one a paper body part and encourage them to add their body part to an outline body you have placed on a wall/table top. Keep this simple. The following link takes you to a very simple outline that could be used, although a search on the internet will find many others (http://fromabcstoacts.com/head-shoulders-knees-and-toes).

OR, add another brick to the church.

6 Aug Pentecost 9
Story: Ephesians 6:10-20
Title: Prepared and Ready
Image: Same image as previous week
Action: Have business card sized cards for everyone as they come in. On each card have an image of an item from today’s reading (belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet) invite them to find other people with the same item and to sit with them for the service.

OR, add another brick to the church.

The Sacraments

13 Aug Pentecost 10
Story: Psalm 46; Acts 2:37-42
Title: Baptism 1: Be Still
Image: Water or place font centrally if possible to move it and drape fabric or crepe paper in watery blues flowing out of it, or create a flower arrangement to represent this idea.
Action: Invite people to simply sit quietly and ‘be still’ as they wait for the start of the service. You may need to remember to let your musicians know.

20 Aug Pentecost 11
Story: Psalm 84; Romans 6:1-11
Title: Baptism 2: Renewal
Image: An image of water or have your font centre again with a jug of water sitting in it. During the Call to Worship have someone pour the water into the font dramatically, allowing the water to splash and even spill over the edge (depending on your floor coverings).
Action: Invite people again to sit quietly before the service begins.

27 Aug Pentecost 12
Story: Psalm 65; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
Title: The Lord’s Supper Preparation
Image: Bread and wine, or set the Communion Table as per your tradition or with a simple goblet and loaf of bread.
Action: Issue invitations to everyone as they come in for the service next week (even if you have already done this as part of your tradition). The idea is to emphasise the invitation and welcome to the Lord’s table. Encourage people to think about others they would like to invite along next week and encourage them to do so. To do this put a note inside or on the back of the invitation.

3 Sep Pentecost 13
Story: 1 Samuel 21:1-9; Matthew 12:1-8 or Mark 14:12-25
Title: The Lord’s Supper
Image: As per the previous week
Action: Ensure everyone is warmly welcomed as a guest. Have extra people on welcome duty to escort people to their seats. Offer a welcome drink/sweet/canape...
We begin a short series focussing on some of the psalms at the start of our summer season this year. This is a great excuse for a lot of singing during worship. With this in mind there is no better place to begin than with Psalm 100, a short but profound invitation to worship.

Even with a mere five verses, it is helpful to explore the structure of this psalm. It comprises four lines each containing three measures. Each line has a specific purpose. The first and third are instructions, and clearly set the use of this psalm as one for a processional entrance into the house of the Lord, the Temple. “Shout with joy”, “Come before God, singing with joy”, “Enter... go... give thanks”. This is a psalm about movement, about the progression of a pilgrim into worship, both literally in entering the gates of the Temple, but also figuratively as the worshiper prepares her heart and soul for the act of worship.

The second line’s three measures give some foundation to the very purpose of worship: it is to acknowledge the Lord, and our place within the work of the Lord. The final line gives the reason for entering the place of worship and sets it both within that physical space and temporal space, acknowledging that the Lord’s love is for now and all time.

Something that gives added depth to this psalm is to remember the layout of Jerusalem at the time of Solomon’s Temple. Unlike later in Herodian times when the Royal Palace was some distance from the rebuilt Temple, at this time the Temple and the Royal Palace were right next door to each other. This knowledge gives us a picture each time people would gather to worship of a decision about which gate to enter: the one of worldly power or the one of divine rule.

This decision of whom to choose as the object of worship is emphasised by the second line’s confession that the Lord is God, we are God’s people. In a time of increasing strains of nationalist rhetoric being heard within many countries, this focus on God is worth reiterating. In a culture where there are also many different choices for activities on a Sunday morning (or whenever your faith community worships), this singular focus on a decision to enter into God’s house is also worth restating.

Having said all this, what one must not lose sight of in exploring this psalm is the sheer joyfulness of it. Psalm 100 is a little nugget of enthusiastic praise, and there is no doubt that this joy is sourced in the being of God, the same God that cares for us and is wholly good, remaining steadfast to God’s people from generation to generation. In other words, it is based on relationship. This may be a door into the theme of the Trinitarian nature of the godhead and the divine relationship we celebrate on Trinity Sunday.

Note that during our own discussions about the psalms the Spill the Beans Team had an interesting discussion about the personal pronouns used in the psalms. They are inevitably, considering the time of composition, male dominated. As we read the psalms together in preparation we did so deliberately using gender neutral language in order to give us a fresh perspective on these often familiar words. This might be something you wish to consider doing with your congregation.

For a bit of general interest background on the Psalms, you might want to visit the short film with Bono (of the band U2) and Eugene Peterson (author of The Message) talking about their friendship which has revolved around a common passion for the Psalms. It is readily available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l4055e90KY.
the story

Make A Joyful Noise

For narrator and five voices.

Narrator: Make a joyful noise to God all the earth:
Voice 1: blackbirds sing;
Voice 2: leaves rustle;
Voice 3: volcanos rumble;
Voice 4: bees buzz;
Voice 5: drums roll!

Narrator: Worship God with gladness; come into God’s presence with singing:
Voice 1: Morning has broken...
Voice 2: If you’re happy and you know it...
Voice 3: All you need is love...
Voice 4: The hills are alive...
Voice 5: All things bright and beautiful...

Narrator: Know that God made us and to God we belong. We are God’s people. We are the sheep and God is our shepherd.
Voice 1: God loves us and made us to love each other.
Voice 2: We are God’s family.
Voice 3: God is our shepherd.
Voice 4: Baaaaaaaaaaaaa!
Voice 5: Maaaaaaaaaaa!

Narrator: Enter God’s gates saying: ‘Thank You!’ Come into God’s house and be glad.
Voice 1: We are welcome.
Voice 2: We are at home here.
Voice 3: We are happy here.
Voice 4: We are family.
Voice 5: We belong.

Narrator: God is good.
Voice 1: God’s love goes on for ever and ever.
Voice 2: God loves our grandparents and our parents.
Voice 3: God loves our brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins and foster-parents and guardians.
Voice 4: God loves our friends and our enemies.
Voice 5: God will love our children and our grandchildren.

All: Amen.

Retelling For Young People

Psalm 100

In Psalm 100 all the earth is told to make a joyful noise to God. Talk about all the happy noises that come from nature: birds, animals, trees, insects and so on. Talk about noises that come from machines: clatter of a train’s wheels, trumpets, clocks, and such like. Talk about happy noises that come from people: cheering at a tennis match, singing, dancing, for example.

- What are your favourite noises?
- Which are your favourite songs?

Gender and The Trinity

The alternative reading for today—Trinity Sunday—is from John’s gospel (John 1:14-17). The three versions below, which can be read by three different voices, could be used to introduce a discussion on gender issues within the Trinity.

Version 1: And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, he who comes after me ranks ahead of me, because he was before me”)

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The law was indeed given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Version 2: And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen her glory, the glory as of a mother’s only daughter, full of grace and truth.

(Joanna testified to her and cried out, “This was she of whom I said, she who comes after me ranks ahead of me, because she was before me”)

From her fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The law was indeed given through Miriam: grace and truth came through Isa Christa.

Version 3: And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen the Word’s glory, the glory as of a parent’s only child, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to the child and cried out, “This was the one of whom I said, the one who comes after me ranks ahead of me, because that one was before me”)

From the fullness of this child we have all received, grace upon grace.

The law was indeed given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season.

The focus image this Sunday could be a big smile emoji.

Give everyone a party blower or party popper as they come in. These are to use during the Call to Worship.

Call to Worship

*If you have circulated party blowers or party poppers encourage everyone to get ready to use them at the end of these words.*

Joy to us all this day.
We come in gladness,
ready to sing our praises
to the mighty God
who made us in his loving image.

His people, his flock,
gathered in this place.
The Lord is good,
his love endures for ever.
Joy to us all this day.
Come let us worship!

Responses

*Based on Psalm 100*

Leader: All the earth be joyful!

All: We worship God with gladness.

Leader: Know that God is good

All: and in his goodness made us his people.

Leader: Enter his home, be welcome.

All: We give thanks for his generosity.

Leader: The Lord is good,
his faithful love endures forever.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God, here we are, in your presence,
we bring our songs
of gladness,
of adoration,
of sadness,
of concern.

You, who made us, accept us as we are with whatever we bring.

Your knowledge of us goes beyond what we can imagine.

Your love for us goes beyond all that we comprehend.

And so, knowing ourselves loved and welcome here, we confess to you all that we might have done better this week and all that we failed to do.

We confess love withheld,
trust abused,
truth obscured,
opportunity squandered.

We confess and we seek your forgiveness along with the will to do better, to better show love, to better hold truth, to better reveal truth and to better use every opportunity you give us to be all that you created us to be.

As we worship you here, as we praise and bless your name may we be restored and renewed to love and serve you in all of life.

Amen.

All-Age Prayer

God who has given us instruments: voices, hands, feet, bodies that dance.

May we use our whole selves to praise you however we can now and forever.

Amen.
Reflective Prayer

God, we praise you
that however we are made
you made us to praise you.
Whether we’re tone deaf
or pitch perfect,
whether we have lots of words
or few,
whether we have rhythm
and especially when we have none,
our bodies, whole or broken,
cry out your praise
and you declare our efforts good!
God, we praise you.
Amen.

Reflection

Gates flung open in welcome
over which
on which
are hung signs proclaiming joy:
painted in every colour of the rainbow.
No signs of Keep Out
or No Trespassing,
no barbed wire,
no locks or chains
but open gates
through which stream people
singing,
dancing,
laughing,
some walking,
some running,
some being carried,
some helped along
all streaming through those wide open gates
to greet the God of all creation
whose arms are open wide in love.

Prayer of Dedication

God in our words
and in our material offerings
in our work
and in our service.
May we always find a way
to praise you for all that you are
and for all that you created us to be.
Amen.

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

O God who promises to pour on us grace upon grace,
as we bring to you concerns for our world,
our church,
our community
and our home.
May we know you equipping us
with sorrow,
with compassion,
with justice
and with love
so that, as we pray,
may we also be the answer to prayer.
Moved by your sorrow
may we seek to bring comfort;
moved with your compassion
may we seek to bring healing;
moved by your justice,
may we seek to reveal wrong and restore right;
moved with your love;
may we seek to hold and value all creation;
may our hearts break where the heart of God is broken
and may our hands move
to recreate all that God wills for all people.
God, whose steadfast love endures forever,
may we tell of and may we show your faithfulness
to all the generations.
Amen.
worship ideas

Take Home Ideas

All through this summer series we are looking at three distinct themes: what it means to be church, what we do when we are in church and the two sacraments recognised in the reformed tradition (Baptism and Holy Communion).

Each week, we will be taking something home and reflecting on what it means for us to be part of God’s church today.

You may have been given a party blower today as you entered church. Take it home! Today we celebrate with joy as have millions of people over thousands of years. Spend time reflecting on joyous occasions and give thanks to God for them all. For a family fun idea, do this together and after each time of reflection or remembering blow the party blower and shout “Amen!”

Sending

Send us out, O God!
May we go
to joyfully celebrate the Spirit of God,
to joyfully share the Good News of the Son,
to joyfully affirm the creative love of God,
alive with us,
every step of the way.

Praise/Hymns

All people that on earth do dwell  CH4 63 / MP 20
Before the world  CH4 317
Come all you people  CH4 757
Faithful,faithful is our God  One is the Body (WGRG) 36
Father, we praise you  CH4 209
God is good we sing and shout it  CH4 178 / MP 185
Hallelujah we sing your praises  CH4 674
How lovely is thy dwelling place  MP 247
Joy to the world  CH4 320 / MP 393
Jubilate everybody  CH4 65 / MP 394
Let us build a house  CH4 198
Let’s sing to the Lord  CH4 126
Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet  CH4 169
Sing a new song  Bring It All To Me, Fischy Music
Sing all creation  CH4 64
Sing to the Lord a joyful song  CH4 184

sunday 11 june 2017
age group ideas gathering

If You’re Happy  all age

Gather the children together and sing "If you're happy and you know it". You could make up your own words and actions. Use this as an introduction to the psalm and the idea of coming to worship God with joy and happy songs.

crafts

Praising People  age 3-5

You will need: A4 card, people figures (either prepare beforehand or buy from craft supplier), crayons, stickers of smiley faces and musical instruments, glue sticks.

Fold the A4 card in half to form a greeting card. Give each child a card and get them to draw gates on the front of the card using crayons and then to decorate around the gates with stickers. Give each child a person shape and get them to draw a smiley face and clothes onto the figure. Stick the figure on the inside of the card using glue sticks.

Talk with the children about songs what make them feel happy. Talk about the psalm and the people feeling happy as they go through the gates to sing to God.

Enter The Gates  age 6-8

You will need: plastic drinking straws or paper art straws, string, scissors, PVA glue, glue spreaders, sticky gems, black A4 card.

Give each child a sheet of black card. Ask the children to design fancy gates using straws cut into different lengths, string and sticky gems. They should lay out their designs onto the black card and once they are happy with the design begin to stick on the pieces using PVA glue.

Talk with the children about gates they go through often such as at home and at school and special gates they’ve gone through like you might find at a cathedral, castle, theme park. Talk about the feelings they have as they go through these gates and how they think the writer of the psalm would have felt on going through the gates to the Temple. Talk about how important and special it is to be able to worship God. Talk about the songs we sing to worship God.

Forever Praise  age 9-12

You will need: CDs, PVA glue, glue spreaders, large sheet(s) of corrugated card cut into wreath shape, permanent markers and/or stickers.

This craft is best done in a group of about four or five people and each group needs a large wreath shape cut from the corrugated card. You might want to prepare this beforehand as cutting thick card can take some time. Alternatively, if you want this to be part of the craft activity for the children then you will need pencils and scissors in addition to what is listed above.

Give each group a wreath shape. Give the children a few blank CDs each. Ask the children to decorate one side of the CDs with drawings and stickers which relate to the psalm such as musical notes, sheep, hearts, gates, smiley faces. The children should then stick the CDs onto the card wreath using PVA glue. The wreath can be hung in your meeting room or worship space.

Talk about a circle/ring like the wreath having no beginning or end and representing ‘forever’. Talk about the psalm and how the psalmist wanted to praise God always because God is loving and faithful always and forever. Discuss with the children ways in which they can praise God.

Enter The Gates 2  all age

You will need: large boxes opened out to form a backdrop (if you have time these could be painted to look like temple walls), card tubes and/or card rolled into tubes, sellotape, scissors, coloured tape for decoration.

This is basically the same idea as the Enter The Gates craft idea (see left) but done cooperatively and on a large scale to make a big decorated gateway, ideally one through which everyone can then pass. You can then try it out singing songs of praise as everyone processes through the gate.
age group ideas

activities

Enter His Gates  age 6-12

You will need: images of famous gates and slips with the names of each gate.

Place the images and the slips with the names around on a table and see if the children can match them up. You could do this with as many local gates as you can find in your own community. This would be good to combine with the craft activities related to creating your own gate design.

Creating Music  age 6-12

You will need: paper, pencils, cut out musical staves, treble clefs, glue sticks.

This involves a bit of preparation in writing out the opening couple of lines of a well known chorus/song that the children will know in musical notation at a big size and placing it up on the wall so everyone can see it.

Encourage the children to work in small groups to use the provided staves and treble clefs to create their own musical score, then to carefully copy the notation of notes onto their musical score. You can talk about the names of the different notes and the duration of each.

See if they can work out what the tune is, and when everyone is done sing it through together. If there is a background story to the song that you might want to share, you could do that too.

Chorus  age 9-12

You will need: paper, pencils.

Pick a familiar song for your group of children and then ask them to work in groups to come up with a few lines to create a new chorus for the song, and if they can include the name of their group or your congregation within it all the better.

Ask them to think about the words they would use to describe God and what God means to them, the Holy Spirit and what they think about Jesus.

Play It Again!  all age

You will need: an array of different musical instruments (you can get packs of them affordably online), or create your own percussion instruments.

Discuss with the children the different instruments and the sounds they make. Which instruments would suit their favourite songs? You could try a wee game of “Guess the Instrument” with a child taking a few in a bag, turning around so that they have their back to the others, then trying one of the instruments.

Let the children play along to some favourite songs, making their own joyful noise.

Trinitarian Instrument  all age

You will need: kitchen roll, lentils, dried peas, card cut to cover the ends of the kitchen roll, sellotape.

You could use the creation of instruments as a way to think about the Trinity and three different forms of the same thing. So, for instance, a tree’s wood fibre can be found as a tree, in the kitchen paper, and in the roll around which the paper is wound; lentils grow on a bush, they can be useful in musical instruments and also in soup; peas grow in pods, they can be dried or you can get them as mushy. While talking about these different aspects, you can create a simple rain-maker instrument.

games

Threes  age 3-5

You could use a song to sing (for example, Three Blind Mice, Three Little Fishies) that has three of something in it as a way to get the younger children to relate the Trinity to the number three. You could also try some relay games with groups of three.

What Am I?  age 6-12

You will need: images or the names of a variety of instruments that can be found in an orchestra.

You can make this into a team game or individual game. Show the children the image of an instrument and see if they can give the correct name. If they do get the right answer, they get a copy of the image for their own band. You can then expand this out to some questions about this week’s psalm (perhaps relating the answer to that question to the first letter of the instrument they will receive to add to their band as a reward). Remember the conductor who in our case is God! The winner is the person or group with the largest number of instruments in their band.
discussion starters for teens
share the joy

Preparation
Have a think about songs for a ‘joy’ playlist and bring a phone or tablet that you could create a playlist on an internet music streaming service like Spotify.

Today we are going to write some psalms and do some singing! There are lots of great and easy to sing psalm tunes. Try one in Common Metre. You will find the metre next to the tune name in most hymnbooks. You can download tunes from lots of hymn sites online.

Opening Activity

Joy Playlist
Create together a ‘Joy’ playlist with songs that make the young people feel good. You might want to use an online music streaming service (or even YouTube) to play the songs. Make sure you have the facility to play the songs loud enough for everyone to hear.

The Word
Read Psalm 100 together.

Activity/Discussion
- What are you grateful for?
- What are you thankful for?

Write a Psalm of praise. You could include what you are grateful and thankful for. It can be harder than it sounds!

Pick an easy tune. Lots of the Psalms in hymn books are set to a tune in Common Metre. That means they are written with four lines. Lines one and three have eight syllables with lines two and four having six syllables. This is often shown as 8.6.8.6

Once written, share the Psalms with each other and try singing one to a well known Common Metre tune (Crimond, for instance, which is usually associated with “The Lord’s my shepherd”).

Living It Out
Living with a grateful attitude changes things. Each night, think of three things you are grateful for that happened during the day. Thank God for those things.
While Einstein revealed that time is truly relative, contradicting the received wisdom that time was a constant, our own experience of time does seem to have a lot more fluidity to it. It is well known that time seems to speed up as you get older. This may be a real effect of the way our brains lay down memories within the networks of neurones that comprise a brain: when we are younger there is so much new memory formation of unique experiences taking place in comparison to when we are older. As the years pass most experiences are very similar to what has already been experienced, so it in a sense ‘blurs together’ with fewer unique memories to mark the passage of time. It can also be why an adventure holiday doing something completely different can seem to make the clock slow in comparison to a similar period of routine drudgery. When you look back there is so much to recount with the former, and almost nothing with the latter.

How long? It is the age old question of young travellers, of course, but more than that it is a question that resonates with anyone caught in a trap of despair or anguish. Time can feel fluid in a bad way, dilating to make a future state of resolution or joy disappear into an undetermined future.

This angst is writ large in Psalm 13, a Davidic psalm expressing his oft repeated claim that God was not quick enough to support him, particularly when enemies were an imminent danger. This direct appeal to God lacks any sense of patience in its opening questions and demands that God “turn and answer” and “restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.” It all sounds rather like a petulant teenager’s hyperbole.

It is, however, rather effective as a piece of writing, gathering momentum and strength as it builds, “how long... how long...?” It is deeply personal in its appeal to God, which would seem to mark a form of protest against God, but which also marks a deep faithfulness on behalf of the psalmist. There is an assumption here that God is at work both in the life of the psalmist and in the world, but also an understanding that God’s time and our own desires and timelines may not always align. We, the objects of God’s unfailing love, do not always grasp the bigger picture, even while we recognise that God has saved us.

Indeed, as mentioned at the start of these notes, the way our brains function means that our perception of reality, of ‘what is’, whether that is causation or the passage of time, depends on a lot of factors that we may not always take into account. Here, David, despite his anxiety at events pressing down upon him, is able to keep some perspective, to step back and acknowledge that while he feels this way he does not see everything or understand everything in the way that God does.

Thus, trust and faith are crucial elements within this psalm. They provide the foundations for the final two verses that turn around the anxiety expressed earlier into an affirmation of faith.

As such, Psalm 13 provides a model for prayer. It is open and honest, it lays down fears and worries, confessing them to God, and does so in hope and faith. It is a song for all ages and all situations, admitting the frailty of our own personhood and acknowledging the salvation provided by God.
the story

How Long, God?

Voice 1: How long?
Voice 2: How long, God?
Voice 1: It feels like you’ve forgotten me.
Voice 2: Will it feel like this forever?
Voice 1: How long will you refuse to look at me?
Voice 2: How long must I suffer?
Voice 1: How long must I be so sad?
Voice 2: How long will those who hate me laugh in my face?
Voice 1: How long God?
Voice 2: How long?

Interval with music or use verses 1 and 2 of “How long, O Lord?” (CH4 7, by John Bell and Graham Maule)

Voice 1: Please God hear me.
Voice 2: Give me light in my darkness.
Voice 1: Please God answer me.
Voice 2: I don’t want to die.
Voice 1: Can’t you hear my enemies rejoicing?
Voice 2: They rejoice because I’m hurting.
Voice 1: Please God hear me.
Voice 2: Please God answer me.

Interval with music or use verse 3 of “How long, O Lord?” (CH4 7, by John Bell and Graham Maule)

Voice 1: I trust you God, I trust you.
Voice 2: I trust in your strong love.
Voice 1: I know that you care about me.
Voice 2: I know that you will save me.
Voice 1: I will sing to you God, I will sing.
Voice 2: I will sing of your strong love
Voice 1: You will always be kind to me.
Voice 2: You will always love me.

Retelling For Young People

Four Stories

Michael and Joseph

Michael was fed up. His friend Joseph had supposed to have been coming round to his house to play at two o’clock and it was now three o’clock and Joseph had not turned up. Michael had tried texting Joseph but there was no answer.

“How long is he going to be,” thought Michael. “How long?”

Max and Ailsa

Max and Ailsa were on their way to see their granny. It was a long journey and they had been in the car for ages. Max had a look at the map to see if he could work out how far they had to go. It looked like they were more than half way there.

They had been travelling quite quickly but now the car was going very slowly. “What’s happening, mum?” asked Ailsa. “Why are we going so slowly?”

“There’s a big lorry up ahead,” said her mum, “and it’s slowed all the traffic down.”

“How long is it going to take to get to Granny’s?” asked Max. “How long, mum? How long?”

Clare and Pete

Clare was cross. She and her friend Pete had just come back from the funfair. One of the rides that Clare and Pete had wanted to go on had a measuring stick by the ride entrance. If you were as tall as the stick or taller you could go on the ride, if you were shorter than the stick you were not allowed on. Clare and Pete were in the same class at school and Clare was two weeks older than Pete, but she was an inch shorter. Pete was allowed on the ride and Clare was not.

Pete was a kind boy and a good friend and he told Clare that if she couldn’t go on the ride, he wouldn’t go on either. He would wait.

“How long will it be until I grow an inch?” thought Clare, “How long will we have to wait until I can go on the ride with Pete? How long?”

Surrinder

Surrinder had chicken pox. It was horrible. Her spots were itchy and her throat was sore. She felt hot and sticky. Her eyes ached if she tried to read. She could not see her friends in case they got chickenpox too. She could not even go downstairs and watch the television. Her mum and the doctor said that she had to stay in bed. Surrinder was feeling very sad.

“How long will it be before I’m better?” Surrinder wondered. “How long?”
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. The image suggested as a focus this week is of praying hands.

Have business sized cards for each person with a short prayer on each. You can either make your own or use something like the Pray it Forward cards from the Church of Scotland’s Mission & Discipleship Council (https://www.resourcingmission.org.uk/shop/pray-it-forward-cards-2016).

Encourage people to use this prayer as they prepare for worship. If they want to pray it forward in the coming week they could pass it on to someone they know.

Call to Worship

Leader: We come with questions.
Pause
Leader: We struggle with patience.
All: We open our hearts to the Lord.
Leader: We come in search of answers.
Pause
Leader: We journey with uncertainty.
All: We put out trust in the Lord.
Leader: Let us worship God together.

All-Age Prayer

Happy or sad, God listens.
When we are by ourselves or with our friends, God listens.
When we are busy or sitting quietly, God listens and answers prayer.

Prayer of Dedication

God who is there through all our highs and lows, whose patience knows no end, we bring our offerings to make a difference in every corner of the world. Amen.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God who holds us in the depths and on the mountaintop we seek your face in worship.

We seek your face to shine on our questions, on our certainties, on our challenges, on our consolation.

Here in this place, we know the freedom to sing your praise while we also ask:
How long, O Lord?
How long before we see your justice?
How long before we see your creation restored?
How long O Lord?

Even as we ask these questions, we acknowledge our complicity in all that ails our world. We acknowledge that often we do not play our part in sharing love, in holding out peace.

The things we do too often differentiate and discriminate and make your kingdom less.

So, Lord, hear our confession, hear our cry for forgiveness and our pledge, with your help, to do better.

And then help us who know we can count on your love and your forgiveness to go and make a difference. To use what you reveal to us here to restore creation according to your will.
Amen.

Reflective Prayer

God, while we see the immediate, you see the past, the present and the future.

While we struggle with the issues of today, you promise your faithfulness for ever.

While we lose patience, you, God, are a God who waits with us, for you know the plans you have for us are plans for good.

You, mother God of all time, meet us in this time, walking with us in darkness and in light.
Prayers for Others and Ourselves

God hear our cry for our world in distress, for all who suffer and cry out for justice, for all who are separated from family and loved ones, for all who have lost hope that things will ever be better, hear our cry:

How long, O Lord?

God hear our cry for your church throughout the world as she seeks to find a way to be your hands and feet, as she seeks to find a way to be inclusive, to be affirming, to bring light and love into darkness and fear, hear our cry:

How long, O Lord?

God hear our cry for ourselves and those whom we love, the bereaved, the lost, the lonely, those weighed down with sorrow and loss, those who watch through the night and pray for the light of the dawn, hear our cry:

How long, O Lord?

And as we cry, “How long?”
Give us your eyes to see, your heart to love and your compassion to make a difference right where we are, in the name of Christ. Amen.

Reflection

How long will the darkness prevail? How long will evil overcome good? How long will injustice triumph? How long will creation be plundered?

Until we rise up and join God in bringing light, in vanquishing evil, in rolling out justice, in caring for the earth, joining hands with the God of all creation to make all things new, to fulfil the promise of peace on earth and hope for the world: a new song for all creation for singing as we join God in acts of love.

Take Home Ideas

This week’s theme has included praying and prayers. You may have been given a small card with a prayer printed on it today. Your challenge this week is to take that prayer and pray it again and, maybe if the opportunity arises, pass it on to someone who needs to be reminded that God hears our prayers.

Sending

Send us out, O God! To speak your words to a waiting world and share those words with all who hear.

Praise/Hymns

Two of the songs suggested this week come from the hymn collection “When Grief Is Raw” from Wild Goose Publications: http://www.ionabooks.com/when-grief-is-raw.html.

Big, big questions Bring It All To Me, Fischy Music
Bring it all to me Bring It All To Me, Fischy Music
Come to me CH4 759
Gabi Gabi Freedom is Coming (this is a collection of songs from South Africa)
God bless to us our bread CH4 763
God of creation online at http://www.carolynshymns.com/god_of_creation.html
How long, O Lord CH4 47
How long, O Lord? online at http://www.carolynshymns.com/how_long_o_lord_i_mourn_and_pray.html
How long When Grief Is Raw, WGP 14
I cry to God When Grief Is Raw, WGP 22
In a deep, deep place Bring It All To Me, Fischy Music
It’s me, O Lord CH4 493
Jesus the Lord said I am the bread MP 384
Longing for light CH4 543
Though hope desert my heart CH4 464
When we are living CH4 726
age group ideas

gathering

What Length Is This?  all age

You will need: items of various lengths (such as skipping rope, uncooked spaghetti, umbrella, twig).

Ask the children to guess ‘how long’ each item is. Use this as a way into the big questions the psalmist asked about how long we have to wait.

crafts

How Long?  age 3-8

You will need: string, scissors, poster paints, tubs for paints, sugar paper, painting aprons or shirts, wet wipes, something to cover working surface, scrap paper.

Give each child a sheet of sugar paper and a length of string of around 30 cm. Ask the children to place their paper in landscape orientation and to fold it in half. Give each child a length of string and then ask them to dip their first finger and thumb into one colour of paint then to roll the string between their fingers till about one third of string is covered.

Then add on a few more colours in the same way, resting string on scrap paper. When string is covered in paint, get the children to twirl the string and make a pattern on one side of sugar paper. If you imagine folded sugar paper as a greeting card, the string pattern should be laid on inside where you would write the greeting. Then fold the sugar paper over and press down which should give a pattern on both sides. If there is time you could repeat with another bit of string. Clean up hands!

Talk about how long the piece of string is and the pattern/mess that has been made. Talk about how we all have times when we have questions and when things get a bit messy. Talk about how God wants to hear our questions and is always with us.

Why, Oh Why?  age 9-12

You will need: ability to play the song “Why, Oh Why” from Fischy Music, copies of the song’s lyrics, A4 card in both a variety of colours and black, pencils, scissors, glue sticks, fine felt tip pens.

Play the song “Why, Oh Why” and get the children to think about the questions that are being asked. Ask the children to draw and cut out a question mark shape from pale coloured card and then to write some of their ‘why, oh why’ questions inside the question mark shape using felt tip pens. Get the children to stick their question mark onto black card.

Discuss the questions the children have written, not to get answers but to see the variety of their ideas, things they are concerned about and wondering about. Talk about the psalmist asking questions of God and how God wants to hear our questions.

Love In The Questions  all age

You will need: thick card, PVA glue, glue spreaders, tissue paper in a variety of colours, pencils, scissors.

Divide the children into groups of four or five. Give each group a large sheet of thick card. Ask one group to draw a big question mark and one group to draw a big heart. Fill in the outlines with scrunched up tissue paper. These shapes could be cut out and displayed.

Talk about the psalm and how the psalmist had questions to ask God, yet in the midst of all the questions relied on God’s constant love. Talk about how God want us to come with our questions and how God always loves us.
activities

Clock Faces  age 6-12

You will need: copies of the activity sheet found on page 109 with three different types of clock face, pencils.

Ask the children to draw the hands to show a variety of times that you give them: 1:20 p.m., 8:40 a.m., 3:15 p.m. and so on.

Start off on the simple clock with numbers already printed out.

Then have them try to add the hands to the clock with no numbers.

Then ask them to draw in 24 hour clock times (military time) that you give them alternating between a.m. and p.m. They can use the template provided and just colour in the segments to create the numbers required.

Give Light To My Eyes  age 9-12

How do we recognise that God can transform situations and bring light into the darkness. There are many stories that can be used from across the world to show God’s response bringing light into places of darkness. Check out the many stories and resources in the Church of Scotland web page under World Mission. Here you can uncover stories of light into darkness in Nepal, Syria, a variety of areas in Africa, Egypt, Israel and Palestine. You could link the John passage to this section and talk about the bread of life because of what we have been commanded to do—to help others—not to do our own will but the will of him who sent me. What can the children we do?

Which Line Is Longest?  all age

You will need: copies of the activity sheet available on page 108, rulers.

Both well-known puzzles are, of course, optical illusions. The line in both cases is the same length. After getting the different ideas from the children you can use rulers to check that they are the same length.

Time Passing Games  all age

You will need: paper, pens.

- What do many people say when they are waiting for something in their lives? (How long is it going to be?)

Ask the children to name all the games that they play as a family when on a long journey. Write them down as the children mention them. Examples might be: How many red cars have passed? I spy with my little eye. Car registration plates that have a number 6 in them.

Once you have the names of the games select some that you can play in your venue or take the children outside.

We ask God ‘how long’ on many occasions as well, but we do that through our prayers. Ask the children to make a prayer up for something they feel we have waited on for a long time.

Time / Sight Games  all ages

There are numerous games you could play relating to time such as “What’s the time, Mr Wolf?” or “Clock in the tower strikes the hour”.

Thinking about verse 1 (Hide your face) and verse 3 (Give light to my eyes) you could play “Blind Man’s Bluff”, “Hide and Seek”, “Pin the tail on the donkey” and so on.

Will You Forget Me Forever?  all age

You will need: one orange, apple, lemon and lime per team.

This is a memory game linking into verse one with the question being asked “Will you forget me forever?”

Arrange the children in a circle and nominate one person to start off. They say, “My name is NAME and I am going on a journey so I packed ITEM.” The second person says, “My name is NAME and I am going on a journey so I packed ITEM and NAME 1 packed ITEM 1.” As you go around the circle this will get longer and longer.
discussion starters for teens how long?

Preparation
You will need a timer. Your phone probably has one or use a watch with a second hand.

Opening Activity

Wait A Minute!
Ask the young people to stand in a line. The object of this game is to see who can accurately count time. Make sure there are no clocks or watches or phones visible!

Say ‘Go’ and start a timer that nobody else can see. When people think one minute has passed they should put their hand up. Try to keep a note what the time is when people start putting up their hands. Who was closest to a minute? Talk about what it felt like to wait.

You could try it for two minutes and see if people were closer or further away from getting it right.

The Word
Read Psalm 13 together.

Activity/Discussion

“How long?” is a big question asked many times by people throughout the Bible.

• What is the longest time you have had to wait for something?
• What were you waiting for?
• How did it feel to wait? Was it frustrating?
• How did you feel when the waiting was over?
• How do you think David felt when he was writing this Psalm?
• What kind of things would make you feel like that?
• Do you ever talk to God about difficult things?

Read verses 5 and 6 again. Even though the writer is going through a difficult time they still rely on God.

Make a list of things that seem to have lasted a long time, good and bad. Pray together about these things, celebrating the good and sharing your concerns for the problems. Try to remember to rely on God.

Living It Out
Relying on God does not mean we absolve responsibility for doing anything! Think about people who are waiting this week. What might they be awaiting (for example, news of someone in hospital, news about examinations). Pray for them.
A Psalm Of Confirmation

Reading through this most familiar of Psalms it is so easy just to reach the end of it without pausing long enough over its component parts and the depth of its content. It is too easy to let the familiarity wash over us rather than register what might be new, illuminating and faith-building. That is the inherent danger with the parts of the Bible most read, or the hymns most sung, or the most well-known stories and themes referred to in the talks and sermons we hear in church. And yet when we do let the content of a familiar psalm like Psalm 23 wash over us with ears ready to hear again and hearts ready to respond, we are blessed with a gemstone of inspiring scripture that impacts on us most positively.

This psalm is incredibly full of imagery: shepherding, companionship, hospitality, nature and dwelling places feature strongly. In some way, the psalmist jumps around a little in the banquet of imagery offered and we might, with a critical eye, comment on some of the contradictions apparently on show. For instance, the jump from ‘He leads me on the right paths’ to immediately a path leading through ‘the darkest valley’. Nonetheless as a whole this psalm seems to just capture the imagination of so many people as a piece of scripture that just works.

Perhaps one reason for it working so well is that for a person of faith it seems to confirm so much of what is basic and foundational in terms of personal faith and trust in God. Scripture as a whole can be a lot of different things. It can be affirming, it can be challenging, it can be educating, it can be stimulating and inspiring. Psalm 23 for many of us is a psalm that is absolutely ‘confirming’: it confirms the characteristics and personality of the God in whom we trust; it confirms those aspects of God that at a given moment feature strongly on our wishlist of what we want/need to be reminded.

Psalm 23 features strongly as the often turned-to psalm in those moments of our personal lives when we need reassurance; in film, TV drama and literature, for instance, it is the psalm that is commonly portrayed as the source of a character’s comfort and strength during a time of trial. This psalm brings confirmation of that part of our understanding that is intrinsic to our trust in God, or to our desire to trust in something outside ourselves that is protecting and which provides a force behind all that is good.

In the psalm, we meet a God who cares, who provides, who leads towards stillness and calm, who restores, who directs us towards safe paths, who rescues us from dark valleys, who fights for us, who comforts, who makes provision for us, who anoints us as his very own, who provides life-long love and care, who dwells with us through eternity.

It is no wonder that when we need this relationship of love and care confirmed, when we need the promise of covenant confirmed, that we are drawn to this psalm.

This week as we focus the attention on this most famous of psalms we must be conscious that people will be drawn to different imagery within the psalm corresponding to what the circumstances of life are that they find themselves in at that moment. How lucky are we to have been given such a blessing as this; where in the space of only six short verses, scripture speaks so powerfully to our human situation, and describes so well the relationship God has with us.
The Host And Shepherd Speaks

You are my beloved lamb, my child, my dear one.
You belong to me like a sheep belongs to its shepherd.
I will see to it that you do not want for anything.
When you get tired,
I will coax you into lying down in lush green pastures.
When you are anxious and restless,
I will lead you beside still waters.
When you feel depleted and defeated,
I will restore the fire in your soul.
If you go walking into places that do you no good,
I will be true to my good name
for leading you in the right paths.
Even if you walk through
the darkest and bleakest of circumstances,
there will be nothing you need be frightened of,
because I will never leave your side;
like a shepherd with his rod to protect and defend,
and his staff to guide and lift up,
I will be there to fend off danger
and draw you reassuringly close to me.

You are my invited guest and I am your banquet host.
I will lay a table before you and prepare a hearty meal
where you can eat in fellowship
with those who were your enemies;
I will bring oil and anoint your head as a sign of blessing;
your cup of wine will be full to overflowing.
Have no doubt that you will know my goodness and mercy
all the days of your life,
and you will belong in my house and at my table,
cherished in my sight and in my affection,
your whole life long.

Retelling For Young People

Like A Shepherd

This is written to go along with the activity based on six stations in the Activities section of Age Group Ideas. Can be sung or said at each station as you make your way through each verse of the psalm. Or could be used on its own.

1. Like a shepherd, like a shepherd,
   God is with me like a shepherd
   knowing God loves me,
   I’m as happy as can be,
   God is with me like a shepherd.

2. By the river, by the river,
   resting, playing by the river,
   knowing God loves me,
   I’m as happy as can be,
   resting, playing by the river.

3. On the pathway, on the pathway,
   God will lead me on the pathway,
   knowing God loves me,
   I’m as happy as can be,
   God will lead me on the pathway,

4. Nothing’s scary, nothing’s scary,
   in the darkness, nothing’s scary,
   knowing God loves me,
   I’m as happy as can be,
   in the darkness, nothing’s scary.

5. Running over, running over,
   my cup’s full and running over,
   knowing God loves me,
   I’m as happy as can be,
   my cup’s full and running over.

6. Safe and sheltered, safe and sheltered,
   in God’s house I’m safe and sheltered,
   knowing God loves me,
   I’m as happy as can be,
   in God’s house I’m safe and sheltered.
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season.

This week the suggested image is of a shepherd (either ancient or modern).

Give everyone a ball of cotton wool as they enter the church. At an appropriate time invite them to come forward and stick their ball of cotton wool to a large piece of card, creating together a collage-style sheep.

Call to Worship

Leader: Guiding us in the wilderness of our lives, keeping us safe in times of trouble,
All: God, our Shepherd, we praise you.
Leader: Leading us through the valley, comforting us in times of pain,
All: God, our Shepherd, we praise you.
Leader: May the familiar words of the psalmist speak to us anew this day as we gather to worship the Lord, our Shepherd.

Prayer of Dedication

Shepherding God, as we have worshipped you, as we have gathered by peaceful streams of love, as we have shared in the feast you prepare, may we respond to all your goodness and your unfailing love.

We offer ourselves to you, dedicating our lives to your service, ready to walk with you wherever you lead. Use us and what we offer in your name, that we might build your kingdom, here and now.
Amen.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Lord our God, shepherd of all your people, we worship you this day for it is natural and proper to do so.
When we consider your sublime provision for our needs, your tireless attention to the detail of creation, and your granting of a full place for us in this world, we marvel at the privilege we have been bestowed. Life with you is good. Life under your protection is good. Life within your direction is special. Life as generated by you is wonderful and exciting.
Yet Lord, as consistent, loving and generous as you are, we at times can be inconsistent in our love towards others, and lacking in generosity as we pursue our own ends too often at the expense of others. Forgive us today: for the inconsistency of our love, holding back concern towards those who struggle while we flourish, our over-contentedness with the way things are when others desperately seek justice, our harming of creation through inappropriate indulgence.
Merciful God, as we come to an honest interpretation of the way we live our lives, grant us your mercy and forgiveness for the mistakes we make and the habits we form that are contrary to your desire for us.
Lord we thank you, for again you hold no love back and as your mercy is received reveal to us your intention for our lives that we might live faithfully in your sight.
In Your Son’s name, we pray.
Amen.
Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Creator God,
we praise you today for the world we live in,
for the ever-changing landscapes
reflecting seasonal changes
as we move from Spring to Summer,
Autumn to Winter
and through the cycle again.

Nature is just one of your gifts to us;
too easily taken for granted,
but when appreciated it is truly a great source of blessing.

In this holiday season,
we thank you for all that the summer promises
and for the time to enjoy it.
We ask that we, and others,
have the chance for rest and play,
travel and adventure,
fun and cherished times with those we love.

Lord of life,
today we can appreciate your care of all.
Yet, we know that there are many
who deserve not just a mention in prayer
but the help of others to support them in life.
Today we recognise that some have no voice,
for the powerful dominate
the world we live in
and some can easily feel forgotten.
We pray for those who live with injustice.
Today we recognise that many live as victims
of mistreatment by others.

We pray for those who have been hurt by violence.
Today we recognise those who are lost,
those who feel they cannot cope.
We pray for those who carry the heavy weight
of depression or anxiety at this time.

Today we know that many are underfed
and have little of the resources we take for granted.
We pray for a fairer world.

Today we know many are lonely
and miss their loved ones who have passed from life.
We pray for consolation and comfort
for those who are bereaved.

Shepherd of the people of creation,
we pray to you today.
Take into your care all who are struggling.
Direct for us the paths we walk
that we might know blessing in life
and be a blessing to others through our actions.
Amen.

All-Age Prayer

Lord, shepherd,
there is nothing at all that you leave lacking
in the life you give us.
Places in which to reside
that provide warmth, shelter and security;
energy, opportunities and wisdom provided to sustain us,
and quench the natural thirsts of our lives.

When we are flat and at a low ebb,
spirit is available to us that lifts us emotionally;
friends and family on hand to lift us physically.
In the times when we walk through the darkest valleys—
times of challenge—you, Lord, are with us.

You have anointed us for we are your people;
your love is unconditional.
And our cups overflow in the goodness and mercy you show us.
Lord let us dwell in your heart forever.
This is our prayer.
Amen.

Take Home Ideas

Having reflected on the favourite 23rd Psalm this week; look at
all the different images there are; not just the shepherd and
the green pastures, but also a table filled with good things; the
image of anointing is one of comfort and care.

This week, find a place where you can feel totally relaxed and
comfortable; take time to speak to a friend you have lost touch
with; share God’s love and care around.
Reflection

David, either pacing or at table with pen in hand.

The Lord is my...
The Lord is my... dustman?
I shall not want.
He picks up my litter
and empties my rubbish away.
No. That’s not quite right.
The Lord is my...
The Lord is my... fireman!
I shall not want.
He pours forth water
and extinguishes my flames.
No. That’s not right either.
The Lord is my...
The Lord is my... mechanic.
I shall not want.
He fixes my squeaky wheels
and leads me to quiet motoring.
No. Still not quite there.
The Lord is my...
The Lord is my... farmer.
I shall not want.
He ploughs the green meadows
and harvests the golden fields.
Hmm. Better.
The Lord is my...
The Lord is my... goatherd.
I shall not want.
He makes me to chew anything I find
and ties me up behind the barn.
Oh, I thought I had it. But I am close.
The Lord is my...
The Lord is my... shepherd!
This could work.
The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul...
That’s the one!

Sending

Send us out, O God,
to follow where you lead
and lead others where you send.

May the blessing of Creator,
Shepherd,
Companion,
rest upon each of you
and go with you into this week.

Praise/Hymns

This week you will inevitably sing The Lord’s my Shepherd. Try
to find a different version to the one you would normally sing.
Maybe even sing it more than once but using different settings.
Some different suggestions are noted below.

Abide with me CH4 580 / MP 4
For the beauty of the earth CH4 181 / MP 152
God, we walk through death's deep valley online at
http://www.carolynshymns.com/god_we_walk_through_deaths_deep_valley.html

How we need you
In heavenly love abiding CH4 551 / MP 331
I want to walk with Jesus Christ MP 302
I will rejoice MP 311

Lord, you are my shepherd online at
http://www.carolynshymns.com/lord_you_are_my_shepherd.html

O soul are you weary? MP 712
The King of Love my Shepherd is CH4 462 / MP 649
The Lord’s my Shepherd CH4 14,15,16,17 / MP 660
The Lord’s my Shepherd (I will trust in you alone) MP 1008
Though hope desert my heart CH4 464
Thy hand, O God has guided MP 705
You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd CH4 355
What Song Am I? all age

You will need: prepare a list of well known songs or nursery rhymes.

Open with a short quiz challenge giving the children a few words from the beginning of a song or rhyme and seeing if they can finish the first line or title of the song.

You can use this as an introduction to this week’s psalm, The Lord is my shepherd, which must be one of the most famous songs ever written in the world.

Make sure to include songs such as “Baa, baa black sheep”.

You could sing together a version of “One man went to mow” with lyrics “One sheep went to graze” instead.

One sheep went to graze, went to graze a meadow,
one sheep and her lamb, (BAA!), went to graze a meadow.

Two sheep went to graze, went to graze a meadow,
two sheep, one sheep, and her lamb (BAA!),
went to graze a meadow.

Three sheep... and so on.

Craft activity

This week we suggest spending your time on an extended craft activity with different stations exploring the six different verses of Psalm 23. Give the children lots of variety and choice in the different crafts and activities. Depending on the length of time over which you meet with the children it may not be possible for the children to spend time at all of the stations. In that instance you might want to gear certain stations towards different age groups, or you could make your session longer and invite members of the congregation to join you.

Verse 1

The Lord is my shepherd,
I have everything I need.

Activity

You will need: long sticks to use as shepherd’s crooks, images of sheep scattered about the room (see page 110).

Scatter the sheep images about your room. Let each child pick a crook and start to walk using it. As they travel around the whole room encourage them to pick up the images of the sheep as they pass by. As you travel discuss what a shepherd does in their job. If you live in a rural setting or have a nearby friendly farmer, could they bring a sheep in for the children to meet?

Talk about sheep.

Verse 2

He lets me rest in fields of green grass
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.

Activity

You will need: lay some blue cloth and green cloth on the ground to represent the grass and water. If you are up for it, a paddling pool for the children to put their feet into.

Let the children sit or lie on the green grass and “paddle” their feet in the blue water. If you have readily accessible grass banks in your church grounds you could use these for this station.

• What can you see as you lie down with your backs on the green grass?
• (If you are indoors) If you were outside, what would you see?
• How do you think the grass would feel to lie down on?
• What do we use water for other than for drinking?
• How does it feel to lie down on grass or to play in water?

Craft

You will need: mirrored or shiny silver card (cut so that each sheet is slightly smaller than A4 size), and thick black card (A4 size). Prepare beforehand by sticking the silver sheet onto the black sheet with glue. Place under heavy books so that it dries flat. You will also need tissue paper in a variety of shades of blue, plus small decorative glass pebbles, sticky gems, PVA glue, and glue spreaders.

Give each child a prepared sheet and ask them to decorate their card with the collage material provided, making it into river and leaving some of the shiny card visible.

In addition to the discussion suggested in the Activity, you could talk with the children about rivers, burns or streams that they know or regularly visit.

• Are these special places?
Verse 3
He gives me new strength.
He guides me in the right paths,
as he has promised.

Activity
Take the children for a short walk. If it is outdoors lead them on
the right paths, making a point of not cutting across gardens or
roads and explain that it is wrong to do something they are not
supposed to do.

Discuss with the children what are the right paths that God
wants us to take? Kind, loving. Generous, helpful, praising God
etc.

• What do you think David meant when he wrote about right
paths?
• What kind of actions would represent walking the right
path for God? (Being kind, loving, generous, faithful, and so
on.)

Craft
You will need: sheets of paper with simple outline drawings of
pathways, perhaps with a fork in the path, felt tip pens, crayons.

Give each child one of the paper sheets and ask them to
colour it in, perhaps adding some interest along the pathway
(trees, flowers, and similar). For older children you could also
encourage them to write words which describe the paths God
calls us to walk, such as paths of kindness, joy, and so on.

Verse 4
Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, Lord,
for you are with me.
Your shepherd’s rod and staff protect me.

Activity
You will need: create some makeshift tents out of chairs/tables
and draped cloth, making the area as dark as possible.

Invite the children inside the dark tent, crawling through it with
their shepherd’s crook. Talk to them about what they find scary.

• What do you do when you are in a scary place?
• Is there anything you would like to have with you?
• Does it make a difference to know you have someone
alongside you?

Craft
You will need: card in different colours, scissors, pencils, heart-
shaped stickers, black card, glue sticks.

Give each child a sheet of coloured card and ask them to draw
round their hands and then cut out the shapes. Then get the
children to decorate the hands with the stickers. Finally stick
the hands onto black card.

In addition to the discussion suggested in the activity you
could discuss with the children who helps them when they are
feeling afraid or lonely or upset and who they help. Talk with
the children about God promising to be with us when things are
difficult for us.

Verse 5
You prepare a banquet for me,
where all my enemies can see me;
you welcome me as an honoured guest
and fill my cup to the brim.

Activity
You will need: a table covered with crockery, cutlery and A5
paper and pens, bread, juice, olive oil.

Ask the children to design their own placemat and then to set
the crockery and cutlery to create a fancy place setting as if for
feast. Let the children taste some of the bread and have a cup of
the juice. You could sing “Running over, running over, my cup
is full and running over” (an older person in the congregation
will probably know this one if you do not!)

Craft 1
You will need: disposable wine glasses or sundae glasses,
stickers, sticky gems, glitter pens.

Let the children decorate their own glass.

Craft 2
You will need: coloured mugs in light shades, porcelain pens or
permanent ink pens.

Give each child a mug and ask them to draw a picture of a cup
running over and/or to write “Full and running over” across the
mug.

Verse 6
I know that your goodness and love
will be with me all my life;
and your house will be my home as long as I live.

Activity
You will need: large cardboard boxes, packing tape, tables.

Using the tables and cardboard boxes, let the children create a
house and sit inside it.

Craft
You will need: small boxes, brown parcel paper, scraps of card
and paper, scissors, sellotape, felt tip pens, glue sticks.

Give each child a box and help them to wrap the box in brown
paper. Ask the children to make the box into a model house,
using felt tip pens and collage materials.

You could talk about what having a home means to the
children and how God offers us welcome, security, a place to be
ourselves and know we are loved.
discuss_starter_the_good_shepherd

Preparation
You will need some art supplies to make a collage. Try to have some newspapers and magazines to cut out and glue to stick them to a large sheet of frieze paper or wallpaper.

Opening Activity
Mood Music
As with a few weeks ago when thinking about playlists, it would be good to have the ability to be able to play a part of the songs that are mentioned either using a music streaming service or YouTube.

• Which songs do you like to listen to when you are feeling happy?
• What about when you are feeling sad?
• Why do these particular songs speak to these different moods?
• What is it in the words or the music that resonates?
• How can music change your mood?

The Word
Read Psalm 23 from two different versions (New Revised Standard Version and The Message would work well, both being available at http://www.biblegateway.com.

Activity/Discussion
Psalm 23 is one of the best-known pieces of scripture, partly because we sing it often and it is frequently either sung at or used as one of the readings at funerals. It is a psalm of blessing and thanksgiving.

Encourage everyone to work together to make a collage of things that they are thankful for. These might be either collective or individual thanksgivings. You might want to look for good news stories in the newspapers or draw or write your own thanksgivings.

• What things did you find?
• Could you write your own verse of the psalm now?
• What image of God would you use?

You might want to use the Reflection provided on page 25 that described King David struggling over the image of God to use.

• Would you use a shepherd? A host? Or something different? Why?

Living It Out
The idea of God looking after us all the time is a good one. Try to remember that God is with you throughout the week.
The Living Word In All Situations

A T A GIVEN MOMENT IN LIFE we tend to be feeling a particular way. That is not to say that over the course of a day, week, month, year we do not fluctuate between different emotional positions; but at a particular moment when we open our Bible to read a psalm, such as Psalm 30, we would expect ourselves to be residing emotionally in a certain place, dictated to by the circumstances of that moment we live in. So, we pick up a psalm and the words speak to us according to our emotional context.

For Psalm 30, depending on our emotional barometer, we might pick up the themes of the great reliability of God who aids us in our time of challenge, who can turn darkness into day, the feeling of death into the feeling of light, who we are indebted to for his good favour that can bring recovery and healing from the most desperate of situations; or we might instead hear an emphasis on how dark life can get, how we can feel like we are falling lower and lower into anguish and weeping, how at times in life it appears we have been abandoned and questions arise in us as to how others fair better in life in comparison to us, and we question why.

As we read a psalm such as Psalm 30 we need to recognise that whilst individually we read a psalm and it speaks to us in a given way, corporately in our worship we find people gathered listening to the Word who exist in very different emotional places; we are a people at any given moment of gathered presence, a mixture of varied contrasting moods and so the way we hear such a psalm as this can be quite different and spark a varying spiritual response in the people present. There is nothing wrong with this, but it does mean that the variety of responses can be quite complicated.

In the Bible your writer is reading this psalm has a title, ‘Thanksgiving for Recovery from Grave Illness’. Some may find in their own context and experience great solace and comfort in the psalm as the emphasis on thanksgiving resonates with them. Yet we need also to be mindful of those in challenging situations who may feel the emphasis on thanksgiving is not appropriate in the present time.

Scripture is not a static, inanimate entity, but is full of life and emotion. It is the Living Word. As we read it and reflect on it and encourage others to spend time with it we need to approach it in a way that allows it to speak directly towards the emotions we live by. As the leaders of worship, we need to remain ever mindful of this and encourage an openness and honesty in our response to the word of God that shuts no emotion out of the context of God’s dealings with us and love for us. In this way we can ensure that all know God shuts no person out of feeling that Living Word speaking to and for them.

Wherever we are in our shared time of worship, there are people who are experiencing the pain and doubts, the dark moments of life; and there are those who are thankful and joyous. How we balance these different perspectives meaningfully in corporate worship is both a challenge but also a privilege.
Andy’s Emotions

Will need some adaptations for your own cultural setting!

Andy: Hey Ada, would you say I am an emotional person?
Ada: Well Andy, I would say you can be a little bit oversensitive at times!
Andy: Oversensitive, Ada? What do you mean by that?
Ada: Well remember the day that St Mirren won the Scottish cup, and you were so happy that you were greetin'? And when you’re watching the movies and something sad happens you end up crying as well. Andy you might think that you are Mr Macho man at times, but at heart you are just a big softie!
Andy: Well, I...
Ada: Now don’t get me wrong, Andy, I am not criticising you, just answering your question.
Andy: So, Ada, do you think it is okay to express our emotions? I mean, we Scottish Presbyterians are not really known to be emotional. Dour maybe, reserved definitely, but not emotional.
Ada: So why all this interest in your emotions all of a sudden, Andy?
Andy: Well, its reading the psalms that made me think about what God thinks when we get emotional. It seems okay to be sad or happy, to laugh out loud or have a good greet, to be in the pit of despair or over the moon wi’ excitement, and God still seems to accept us as we are. He doesn’t seem to get upset over our emotions, but seems to accept us just as we are.
Ada: Do you think that is a good thing or a bad thing, Andy?
Andy: Well, it has to be a good thing, for if God accepts us no matter where we are emotionally, then maybe other people should do as well.
Ada: That’s right, Andy.
Andy: And I will tell you what else I discovered about the psalms today, Ada. There seems to be a psalm for just about every emotion under the sun, covering the whole range of our human experience from birth to death and life ever after!
Ada: Yes, Andy, they are a collection of all of life’s experiences, and offer words of comfort, courage and inspiration to God’s people.
Andy: I mean, listen to the words at the start of Psalm 30: “I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me.”
Ada: Wise words as usual, but how did they apply to you today, Andy?
Andy: Well, when they Morton fans were winding me up about beating my beloved St Mirren, I did not get angry and retaliate, but asked God to cheer me up by singing my favourite song 'When the saints go marching in'.

Retelling For Young People

EMOTIONS

E is for emotions, both good and bad.
M is for mad when things don’t go my way.
O is for ominous, when my future looks bleak.
T is for tedious, when time passes slowly.
I is for important, when I do something good.
O is for oversensitive to what other people say.
N is for nervous, at what might happen next.
S is for secure, when I know Jesus is near.
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. The suggested image this week is the same as that for Pentecost 2, an image of praying hands.

Give everyone a Post-it note and make sure there are pencils or pens available. Encourage people to write down something or someone for whom they are grateful. During the first hymn these could be gathered in and placed somewhere suitable (for example on the Communion Table or at a foot of a cross).

Call to Worship

So many emotions in this place...

Pause

With volumes of joys...
With catalogues of sorrow...
With contentment...
With doubt...
We worship.

All-Age Prayer

There is night time and there is day time.
There is darkness and there is light.
There is sadness and there is joy.
There is challenge and there is peace.
There is crying and there is laughter.
Life is a mixed bag.
It is exciting yet it can be hard.

One thing is certain Lord,
ever is your love for us exhausted,
and never does your love for us fail.
You are the God of all emotions;
the companion through both night and day,
darkness and light.
Thank you for being there!
Amen.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Lord, to and fro fluctuate our emotions.
At times, we are up; at times, we are down.
At times, we are content; at times, we are riddled with doubt.
At times, we are at peace, at times we are fraught with worry.
At times, we are sad, at times happy.
And there is not much that we can do to protect ourselves against this varying emotional experience.
This is life.
And yet, one thing we are asked to trust in
is your presence in the good and bad.
As the living and present God,
we can experience your Spirit
in all the emotions of our lives.
In the midst of joy, yet present too in sorrow.
Companion in the moments of peace,
yet present too as comforter in times of pain.

Merciful God,
it is so easy to forget
that through the whole of life
you are ever-present.
For times when we doubt,
when we are forgetful
and when we are blind to reality,
forgive us.
It is natural too to think that in the moments of challenge
you are absent.
For such lack of trust forgive us.
Often, we react towards you with disgust as if you
are the cause of the troubles we face.
For our lack of understanding, forgive us.

Lord in mercy and love
you have rescued, protected and led your people
through the wildernesses of the world,
and of their own making.
In our own weaknesses at this time,
grant us once more such a strong sense of your presence,
that we are reminded of the unconditional love of our Father,
and the promise of eternal covenant.
Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Reflective Prayer

If for just one day
we might walk in the shoes of others,
what might we learn, Lord?

That it hurts
to tread a path of despair and hopelessness;
that it is frightening
to face a difficult journey alone;
that it takes courage
to step into new and unknown territory;
that it is frustrating
to never get to where you want to be;
that it is wishful thinking
to even be able to stand;
that it is painful
to walk with no shoes at all.

You walk in those shoes
every day, Lord.
Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Healing God,
In times of poor health,
we are grateful for the health services in our country:
for doctors, nurses, health practitioners, chaplains,
administrators, support workers and carers, we thank you.
So often taken for granted,
we recognise today the value to humanity
of the medical and scientific research and advancements
that have taken place through centuries,
and the dedication of those who work to take care of others.

We thank you too for family and friends
who volunteer time and love
to give to others,
especially when challenging times are encountered.
As people,
we have been given great gifts
that allow us to befriend and take care of those we love,
and those we hardly know but encounter on our life’s journey.
We thank you for making us such an asset of care to others.

Lord, today we pray for those in the world
who lack the standard of health services that we are granted.
There are many across our world
for whom medicines and appropriate medical care
are more scarce than it should be.
We think of those in the developing world
where epidemics happen all too frequently
and the available vaccinations and treatments
to cope with such crises are limited.
But we think too of those who live in countries
where health care and medicines are available,
yet because of insurance-based health systems for some,
and not all,
access to the care they need
is too often a significant problem.

Lord, today we ask that as we remain silent for a while,
you receive the personal prayers of each one here,
that you may hear the concerns that are real for each of us,
and direct your care to those we mention before you.

Lord, we thank you for listening and for caring.
Amen.

Reflection

A contemporary rewording of the psalm.

I have to hand it to you God,
you got me out of that mess
and wiped the smile from the face of my enemies.
Thanks!

My throat was sore calling to you,
yet piece by piece,
shard by shard,
you fixed me up again.
You generously opened up your box of second chances
when I was all out of second chances.
Thanks!

So I can only join in,
sore throat though I have,
with the heavenly philharmonic,
and sing my thanks to you, O God,
for the way of heaven-shaped love,
held in grace,
and unfolding renewal.
Thanks!

My day may start with sorrow,
but by evening tears are rolling down my face,
but these are made of joy
for the transformation you bring.
Thanks!

I want to boast,
and I can do that well,
but as soon as you turn your face,
everything collapses.
I'm not strong without you.

Please don't turn your back again.
Help me,
haul me
out of the shadows and holes
my life seems to attract at times,
and hear my deep thanksgiving
for every moment
that comes from you,
filled with laughter and dance,
where the song of freedom
rises within me,
and I cannot stop the praise
I find within me,
alive with thanks,
and thanksgiving.
Prayer of Dedication

Generous God,
the life we have comes from you.
Everything that is good is your gift to us.
In acknowledging your eternal goodness,
we make these offering today,
as we confirm ourselves to be your people,
and pledge to work for the good of others and the world,
through the proper use of the gifts you give.
Amen.

Take Home Ideas

Today you were asked to think of someone or something you
wanted to give thanks for, during this week let that person know
how much they mean through a phone call, the sending of a
card, or if they are nearby go and see them.

Sending

Send us out, O God,
with thankful hearts
to share your love and compassion.

Praise/Hymns

Father God, I wonder CH4 186 / MP 128
For thou, O Lord MP 158
God is good, we sing and shout it CH4 178 / MP 185
How good it is to thank you Lord CH4 56
I waited patiently for God CH4 31
Jesus put this song MP 376
Let everything that has breath MP 1001
My Jesus, my saviour CH4 531 / MP 1003
Now thank we all our God CH4 182 / MP 486
O worship the Lord CH4 201 / MP 529
Praise and thanksgiving let everyone bring CH4 170
Praise, I will praise you Lord CH4 175
Teach me to dance MP 936
This is how I’m feeling Sing To Make You Feel Good,
Fischy Music

You are my strength when I am weak MP 1019
**age group ideas**

**gathering**

**Feelings  all age**

You will need: the facility to either play "I Feel Good" (from These Are Our Emotions) or "This is how I’m feeling" (from Sing To Make You Feel Good) both by Fischy Music.

Listen to the song, singing with it and performing the actions. Act out possible situations relating to the different emotions mentioned in the song. This is an easy introduction to the idea that it is okay to have different feelings.

The Disney Pixar film "Inside Out" could also be a useful resource today to show a clip relating to emotions. For the youngest children you could sing "If you’re happy and you know it" today.

**crafts**

**Smiley Faces  age 3-5**

You will need: paper plates, crayons, collage materials, PVA glue, glue spreaders.

Give the children a paper plate each and ask the to draw a face showing an emotion and to colour in the plate in the colour that they think fits the emotion. Have a look at the list in the Activities section for a guide. The children could also use collage materials to add further features to the face. Repeat with another plate and a different emotion.

Gather all the plates together and identify the emotions. Talk with the children about it being okay to have different feelings and that we can bring all our different feelings to God.

**Emoting Dolls  age 6-8**

You will need: cardboard tubes (two per child with one being slightly narrower than the other, so that the narrower one fits inside the bigger one. The narrower one should be able to be moved with ease but not so narrow that it just falls through. You could prepare the cardboard tubes beforehand to save time or making the tubes could be part of the activity.), felt tip pens, scissors, sticky shapes to decorate.

Give the children two tubes, one of each size. Get the children to imagine that the larger tube is a figure and get them to cut out a circle at the appropriate level for a face. Ask the children to place the smaller tube inside the larger and to draw circles, using the hole just cut as a guide, at various points on the smaller tube. The children should remove the smaller tube from the larger and draw faces with the felt tip pens onto the circles. The faces should have a variety of emotions. The children should then decorate the outside of the larger tube into a figure using felt tip pens and stickers. Once both tubes are completed the children should place the narrower one inside the larger one and be able to turn the narrower one round to reveal different faces and emotions in the ‘face’ window.

Ask the children to show each other their ‘dolls’ and identify the emotions. Talk with the children about it being okay to have different feelings and that we can bring all our different feelings to God.

**Squidgy Faces  age 9-12**

You will need: balloons, flour or fine sand, spoons, permanent markers.

Give each child a balloon, letting them choose the colour. Ask them to spoon flour/sand into the balloon, tie a knot in the balloon to secure it. For extra security, you may want to use a second balloon, cutting the open end off and pulling it over the other balloon to give a second layer with the knot of the first balloon inside the second balloon. Ask the children to draw a face with an emotion onto the exterior. They might want it to be an emotion matching the colour of the balloon. Repeat until you have a variety of emotions represented.

Let the children play with the faces, squeezing and squidding them into different shapes. Talk with the children about it being okay to have different feelings. Look at the psalm and see if the children can identify different emotions in the words of the psalm. Talk about how God wants us to be able to express our different emotions and not to think that we can only go to God with happy feelings.

**Mixed Up Faces all age**

You will need: paper plates, scissors, sellotape, garden canes (cut into lengths of about 30 cm, or use rulers), felt tip pens.

Get the children to cut the plates in half and to draw either the bottom half of a face or the top half of a face onto a half plate using felt tip pens. The half faces should show emotions. Get the children to do a few each so that you have a wide variety, Attach the sticks to the half plates so that two half plates can be held in front of a child’s face. Mix and match so that you can discuss a range of emotions.

Talk with the children about it being perfectly normal to have different feelings. Talk about how the Psalmist wrote a prayer to God which included all different kinds of feelings. God wants us to be able to express our different feelings and not to think that we can only go to God with happy feelings.
activities

Colours Of Emotion  age 6-12
You will need: either coloured balloons (see Squidgy Faces Craft activity), or different coloured papers (you could print colour samples if you do not have stock paper in the appropriate colours).

There are many theories about the meaning and associations of colours so you can use the list here or look up your own.

• Red is the colour of energy, action, ambition and determination. It is also the colour of anger.
• Orange is the colour of social communication and optimism.
• Yellow is the colour of the mind and the intellect. It is optimistic and cheerful.
• Green is the colour of balance and growth. It can mean both self-reliance and being at peace.
• Blue is the colour of trust. It can suggest loyalty and integrity.
• Indigo is the colour of intuition. It can mean idealism and structure.
• Purple is the colour of the imagination. It can be creative and individual.
• Turquoise is the colour of communication and clarity of mind.
• Pink is the colour of unconditional love and nurturing.
• Brown is the colour that is friendly yet serious, down-to-earth, that relates to security, protection, and comfort and material wealth.
• Grey is the colour of compromise.
• Silver is the colour that has a feminine energy; it is related to the moon and the ebb and flow of the tides: it is fluid, emotional, sensitive and mysterious.
• Gold is the colour of success, achievement and triumph.
• White is the colour at its most complete and pure, the colour of perfection. The colour meaning of white is purity, innocence, wholeness and completion.
• Black is the colour of the hidden, the secretive and the unknown, creating an air of mystery.

Discuss with the children what has been happening in the last week or month or so for them. Has it been good or bad? Ask the children to select a colour from the balloons or paper that shows how they are feeling today. Discuss with the children what these colours say about them and remember only to use positive points. Once all the colours are replaced ask the children to give the leaders a colour that looks like it matches their mood. Depending on numbers they may wish to give colours to each other as they see their friends. Did they find appropriate colours?

It’s Love, It’s Love  all age
Sing the chorus “It’s love, it’s love, it’s love that makes the world go round.”

This song brings out the imagery of God’s steadfast love. Discuss with the children who they think loves them. Parents, grandparents, siblings, friends. How do they know that they are loved? How do the people in their lives show that? Answers could be: by looking after them, caring, helping and even giving them into trouble by telling an adult about something they have done that they should not have, showing right from wrong.

It’s Love, It’s Love  all age

You will need: images of different emoticons (see page 111 for sample sheet).

Have the images on display and ask the children to select the one that they like the best. Discuss why they picked that one. Ask the children to them pick an emoticon that describes how they are feeling today. One day you can be feeling good and happy and other days not so good. We can talk to God at any time about anything because he knows how we are feeling. Can the children design their own emoticon that shows us speaking to God? Give the children situations that show good and bad situations and ask them to pick the emoticon that goes with that emotion, such as, playing with a friend, being at a party, being cheeky, not keeping their room tidy, riding a bike, helping with the dishes, doing their homework.

games

Hiding Games  all age

You will need: blindfold.

Picking up on the “you hid your face” line in this week’s psalm, you could play many different hiding games that require someone to hide their face while everyone else finds a hiding place. Examples are Hide and Seek, Sardines, Bear in the Honey Pot.

You could also try pairing children up and blindfolding one of the pair while the other gets them to do some activity: walking around without bumping into objects, writing a sentence onto a sheet of paper, drawing a picture onto a flip chart, and so on.
Preparation
For this week’s Opening Activity you will need a selection of songs and a way of playing them. You will also require some art materials for the final timeline activity.

Opening Activity
Name That Tune
Begin with a round of “Name that Tune.” You could use a variety of songs for instance from old TV shows, hymns, oldies but goodies, pop music, and so on.
You could maybe add in some modern worship songs that the group might be familiar with. The song ‘Blessed Be Your Name’ by Matt Redman would tie in well with today’s reading.

The Word
Read Psalm 30 together.
Although David wrote so many praise songs to God, they were not necessarily all happy songs. His life had plenty of challenge: there was the battle with Goliath; Saul hated him and tried to kill him; there were threats from other enemies.
David experienced tragedy in his life too. His and Bathsheba’s first son died as a baby; another son, Absalom, tried to overtake the kingdom; his only daughter was assaulted by one of his other sons. And in his life he had committed adultery; he murdered; and he neglected his family life. Yet in it all, David chose to continue to praise God.

Activity/Discussion
• What might the psalm reveal about the person who wrote it?
• Does it say anything about the life he has had up until now?
• Does hearing about the challenges in David’s life change how you appreciate the song?
• What might the psalm say about God?
• Is there a line or verse in the reading/song that stands out for you?

Living It Out
In the time remaining encourage your group to create individual timelines. Like David, all our lives have their ups and downs; moments where we face challenges and times where everything seems great.
Timelines could include:
• First memory
• First day at school
• Happiest moment
• Saddest moment
• First holiday
• Biggest achievement
• Future ambitions

Provide an opportunity for the group to feedback and share if they feel comfortable to. With next week in mind ask the young people to think about a song that might make a good soundtrack to their lives. Invite them to bring along a song or piece of music that they like or is significant to them for the next session.

Note: ask the young people to bring a song or piece of music next week that they enjoy or are moved by.
There is something interesting happening in this passage today. There are lots of commands to praise God but no reason given as to why. Some say this is because the whole Book of Psalms gives all the reason you need, now it is time to just get on with it. Go praise!

If the Book of Psalms had been written in one go then it would feel like this psalm had been specially written to conclude the book. Perhaps it was by the editor who compiled these particular psalms into this particular book. Sometimes you just need to give it laldy (as we say in Scotland) and go for it. There is a generation growing up however who always need a reason to do things. They will do it, but they have to understand the purpose and the outcome and for how long and where and when. This psalm must be counter-intuitive for those folk because it is saying that sometimes you will not understand fully why you are doing what you are doing. You just have to go for it and see what happens.

The purpose in praising is not always to recognise our place in the great relationship with the creator. Praising is part of the growing into relationship with God. It is how we communicate and relate to God rather than an act of subservience to God. This is an important thought because often in our faith traditions we imagine our chief aim is to do as God commands, to be obedient. Yet this is not necessarily so. Our chief aim, if you take the Westminster Confession of Faith, itself based on Paul’s thoughts, is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. This last psalm offers us that purpose: to glorify God.

The psalms leading up to this particular one have outlined the obedience, the lament, the pain of broken relationship and the joy of restored ones, of keeping law and relying on God. All of these lead to this psalm, the final one, which is the conclusion of that journey: to praise God. Perhaps it is in the praising that we find our calling, and our purpose and who we truly are.

The psalm also offers us ways of understanding how we praise. Yes, if offers a whole variety of instruments that a number of generations may not fully appreciate on a Sunday morning, but that is not really the point. The point is for everyone to bring their own unique gift and to raise the roof in their own way. It may not be instruments at all but in stories and actions and singing; whatever ways bring the whole diversity of the community together with each individual finding space for his or her gift to be offered in praise to God.

What God might think of such a maelstrom no one knows but unlike our western culture which is all based on quality of outcome, the praise is all found in the doing and being.

That too is a significant truth in this psalm. It is not one that offers direction or a particular style of praise, or even the words to use. It commands the people to give of themselves and to be in praise to God. In many ways traditional singing where there is no music such as in Africa, illustrates this point: you sing the line you can, making it up as you go, but it all seems to fit. Everyone is part of it singing your own harmony, unrehearsed, straight from the soul and it makes a joyful, holy, sacred, wonderful noise. Use instruments, if necessary, but be in praise with the creator.
Let Me See Again

Andy comes in singing, battering a tambourine or a drum, making a lot of noise, and if any children are present inviting them to join him.

Andy: “Here we go, here we go, here we go...”
Ada: ANDY! WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING?
Andy: I am praising God, Ada! Praising God!

Continues singing “Here we go” and making lots of noise.

Ada: ANDY, WILL YOU PLEASE HUSH UP!

Andy comes to a clattering halt and looks crestfallen and a bit sheepish.

Ada: Thank you. Just what on earth were you doing making such a racket?
Andy: I told you I was praising God. It tells you to do that in the Bible. “Use trumpet, harp and lyre” it says, but I don’t have any of those instruments so I just used what I had at hand.
Ada: But just making lots of noise and singing is not the way we praise God in our church.
Andy: Aye, that’s for sure! Have you seen some of the folk in our congregation, they will no’ even clap if there is a ‘clappy’ bit in a song. You would think someone had tied their hands together before they came into the service! And you would think some of them had Botox injections to stop themselves from smiling! I think they take being dour Presbyterians too far.

Starts singing “Here we go” again.

Ada: Andy, Andy, stop! People love your enthusiasm but you need to calm down!
Andy: Calm down, Ada. God wants us to praise him. With musical instruments, dancing, clapping, singing, our whole being. He wants us to let go and give it ‘laldy’ for him every once in a while. It is good for the soul

Singing “Here we go” once more.

Ada: Andy, we all love your enthusiasm. It is indeed good to praise the Lord with our whole being. It can even be liberating and freeing for some people.
Andy: But that is what I am trying to do. Encourage people to open up to God. To enjoy being with God. To discover what it’s like to enjoy ourselves being in the very presence of God. That has to mean that we hold nothing back from him.
Ada: Do you know I happen to agree with you for a change. Maybe if I join in, others might join in with us!

Andy & Ada both start singing “Here we go”, banging instruments, and encouraging others to join in their praise to God.

Retelling For Young People

Praise God

You will need: a variety of musical/percussion instruments.

Today is all about praising God with our whole being. Rather than telling a story you might just invite children to create some rhythm and noise with a collection of musical instruments.

You could encourage them to dance to a hymn tune such as “Teach Me to Dance”.

Or perhaps you could teach them a song such as “If you’re happy and you know it” which expresses joy using sounds, or perhaps maybe another action song that you know that really lets children express themselves Joyfully.

Whatever you do, praise God and make him smile!
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. This week’s suggested image is an orchestra or band.

Hand out simple percussion instruments to people as they gather (these could be very simple such as crisp tubes with some rice inside, plastic cups with dried beans, or some cheap store-bought items, even kazooos or party blowers. Let people have free rein over when they would like to join in the worship with their instruments.

Call to Worship

Leader: With our hearts and voices raised
All: We praise the Lord!
Leader: With joy and thanksgiving on our lips
All: We praise the Lord!
Leader: With shouts of Hallelujah and hands reached out for Shalom
All: We praise the Lord!

All-Age Prayer

For this prayer (if practical) use The Message version of Psalm 150. Position participants around the church including at the door and have as many musical instruments available as possible to use at the appropriate time. If no instruments are available then get people to mimic them!

All:
Women: HALLELUJAH!
People at door of church: Praise God in his holy house of worship,
Men: praise him under the open skies;
Children: praise him for his acts of power;
Men: praise with a blast on the trumpet;
Women: praise him by strumming soft strings;
People at door of church: praise him with castanets and dance;
Children: praise him with banjo and flute;
Men: praise him with cymbals and a big bass drum;
Women: praise him with fiddles and mandolin.
All: Let every living, breathing creature praise God!
Hallelujah! Amen!

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

How shall we praise you, Lord?
Your power surrounds us in the glory of creation.
Your presence enfolds us in the silence of a sacred space.
Your love speaks to us in the awesomeness of nature.
We listen for your voice above the noise of life.
We discern your Spirit's whisper deep within our souls.
We breathe in rhythm with the heartbeat of your grace.

And yet our praise is often discordant and flat.
We refuse to sing in harmony with your will.
We exclude others from our chorus of love.
The broken strings of our lives lie frayed and useless.

Forgive us, Lord, when we fail to dance to your tune.
Guide our steps once more that we might move with you towards a world which resonates with justice, peace and praise.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

For our international readers “Strictly” refers to the TV Show Strictly Come Dancing.

We may sing with angel voices or be afraid to open our mouths.
We may strike up a chord or our fingers may fumble.
We may dance like “Strictly” stars or have two left feet.
What we can all do, Lord, is offer you these gifts as a sign of praise and a sign of our commitment to serve you in whatever way we can.
Bless them and bless us.
Amen.
Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Loving God,
as we remember others in prayer
we offer you our worth-ship.
We give back something of who we are
and what you have made us
for we are nothing without you
and without one another.
You have created us to live in community
with friends and strangers,
with the comfortable and the uncomfortable,
with the easy and the challenging.

And so we pray acknowledging
not just how much you love us,
but also how much you value those
for whom happiness
has long left their hearts;
for whom a song of joy
has dried upon their lips;
for whom no music plays
within the barrenness of their soul.

There is no melody more beautiful, Lord,
than that of justice sounding her arrival,
than that of compassion crooning comfort,
than that of peace murmuring her promise,
that love will one day destroy hatred.
Open our ears to listen for your heavenly refrain
amidst the cacophony of life
and make us instruments of your grace
that all might know their worth in you.
Amen.

Reflective Prayer

This is adapted from Pray Now: Living Stones 2015.

Sky, my light.
Earth, my mat.
Leaves, my cushion.
Hills, my altar.
Breeze, my music.
Birds, my choir.
River, my song.
Flowers, my incense.
Roots, my Bible.
Dew, my cup.
Berries, my bread.
Bower, my shrine.
Stones, my offering.
Silence, your grace.
Breath, my salvation.
Everywhere
is a temple, Lord.
May our lives
be sacrifice of service.
Amen.
Reflection
Music is the food of love!
So we are told.
Music is certainly a gift,
given to us by God.
It can convey all kinds of emotions;
happiness, sadness
joy, despair
celebration, loneliness
love, hate.
Music takes us high,
music takes us low.
There is a vastness in its reach and range.
Some sounds grate,
some sounds soothe.
The tempos vary,
largo to prestissimo,
the volume changes,
pianissimo to fortissimo.
Whether we like the slowest beat
or the fastest beat,
something to sway to
or something to jive to,
God has gifted music to us.
Whether we like the loudest triple forte
resonating through our bones
or the softest triple piano,
barely a whisper,
God has given us the
food of love.
Music.
Through it everything that breathes
can praise the Lord!

Take Home Ideas
You may have been encouraged to make a joyful noise today!
This week think of how music makes an impression in your life:
try to listen to music you've never heard before, try new styles
or a different radio station. Give thanks for the way music can
fill us and influence our mood.

Sending
Send us out, O God!
Let us lift our voices to sing,
let us sing your songs to all.
May the blessing of God
echo in our hearts,
resonate in our lives,
joyfully go with us
now and always.

Praise/Hymns
Come, now is the time to worship  CH4 196
Let all creation dance        CH4 149
Let all the world in every corner sing  CH4 122
Let’s sing to the Lord, yes, sing God a new song  CH4 126
My life flows on in endless song  CH4 565
O praise ye the Lord           MP 653
Oh, come, and let us to the Lord     CH4 59
Praise Him on the trumpet      MP 558
Praise the Lord               MP 562
Praise the Lord in the rhythm of your music  ATAS 203
Praise the Lord! Praise him                         MP 561
Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet  CH4 169
Sing for God’s glory           CH4 172
Sing to God new songs of worship  CH4 173
Sing to the Lord a joyful song       CH4 184
Sing to the Lord with all of your heart  CH4 156
Take up the song             CH4 171
There was one, there was two     ATAS 238
Praise Him!  

You will need: a variety of musical instruments and/or noise makers. 

Simply enjoy having some fun making noise together. Perhaps give some simple rhythms that the children need to sound back to you. Or play along with some music. Do not be afraid to make a lot of noise!

Use this as an introduction to this week’s psalm.

crafts

Music Makers  

age 3-5

You will need: a copy of the Teddy Horsley book 'Music Makers' by Leslie J Francis and Nicola M Slee based on Psalm 150 would be useful for this age group today, paper plates, crayons, sellotape, PVA glue, glue spreaders, scraps of paper, card, ribbon.

If you can get your hands on a copy, then read 'Music Makers' and following that get the children to make teddy faces and pictures of 'round' instruments such as a drum, tambourine, cymbal. Use paper plates for both teddy faces and instruments, colouring in with crayons and adding ears to teddy face and streamers or other decorations to the instruments using scraps of collage material.

Talk to the children about music, songs and instruments and how all of these can be used to praise God.

Scratch-It Musical Instruments  

age 6-8

You will need: craft hits with scratch-it cards in the shapes of musical instruments. You can buy these from Baker Ross or other craft suppliers.

Give each child one or two instrument shapes and get them to draw designs using the wooden stick tool which reveals colours underneath.

Talk with the children about instruments. You could talk about the instruments they play, instruments they like / do not like, or instruments they would like to try. Talk about the psalm and the way the writer of the psalm called and encouraged each person to play their instrument to praise God.

Musical Art  

age 9-12

You will need: instruments, thick card, pencils, felt tip pens, glue sticks.

If any of the children play instruments, ask if they would like to bring them today to show to the rest of the group and to talk about their instrument. For instance, where they are learning to play, what they like about playing an instrument, what is special about their instrument. If no child in your group plays a musical instrument or they are reluctant to bring it in, then ask a teenager or adult member of your congregation who plays an instrument to come along today. Get the children to make a picture of an instrument, either one they have seen today or one they are familiar with. They can do this either by drawing and colouring freehand or by you providing a simple outline of a musical instrument for them to colour. They could try colouring their picture using the pointillism technique which solely uses lots of small dots to provide the colour and shading. Examples of pointillism can be found on the internet and be prepared for some bashed felt tip pen points! Mount these pictures onto larger sheets of card in a contrasting colour, using glue sticks.

Talk with the children about instruments. You could talk about instruments they play, instruments they like or don't like, instruments they would like to try. Talk about the psalm and the way the writer of the psalm called and encouraged each person to play their instrument to praise God.

Junk Orchestra  

all age

You will need: boxes, plastic tubs, yoghurt pots, elastic bands, string, scissors, sellotape, dried peas, lentils, card, stickers.

Lay out all the materials and invite the children to create a variety of instruments. They could be instruments which look like instruments they are familiar with, or ones which are completely new and made up.

Talk with the children about instruments. Do any of them play instruments? Which instruments? Do they play in a group or orchestra at school or in the area? Talk about the instruments they have made and get them to do a demonstration of the noise their instrument makes. Play the instruments together either singing a well-known tune or playing a song on CD. Talk about the psalm and the way the writer of the psalm called and encouraged each person to play their instrument to praise God.
activities

Write Your Own   age 6-12

You will need: paper, pens, different hymn books.

Can you write your own hymn?

Encourage the children and young people to look through the hymn books that you have provided. Point out to them the different hymns that are available from hymns with multiple verses to simple choruses that have only one verse. Encourage them to think about what they would like to say to God when other people are singing the hymn, the length of their hymn and the style of their hymn. Their hymn can be thanking God for the people and world around us or wondering at God’s magnificent creation! Once they have written the hymn, can you find someone who can write the music?

Remind the children and young people that God gave us music and musicians. Encourage them to thank God for these gifts and that we give him praise through music.

Design Your Own   all age

You will need: paper, colouring pens, child-focused Christian CDs.

Challenge the children and young people of your group to put together a service full of their favourite hymns/songs which they sing at church, Sunday School/Sunday Club. Put together the Top 10 of suggestions. You could further challenge the children to make a service reflecting specific emotions.

God encourages us to worship him through song. Encourage the children and young people to praise God!

Praise The Lord!   all age

You will need: musical instruments (perhaps use one you made earlier form a craft activity), a Top 10 hymn/song list from the activity above, the hymns written by the children and young people from the activity above.

Using all the resources that you have collected above for the last minutes of your time together, use your instruments, the hymns that the children and young people have written, the Top 10 favourite hymns/songs that you have put together earlier and Praise God together using them! You may also want to consider joining in with the rest of the congregation and worship together as a Church family. Remember verse six of Psalm 150: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”

games

How Do You Feel?   age 3-5

You will need: different types of hymn.

Play a selection of hymns/Christian songs and encourage the children to move or dance to the rhythm of the song. Some hymns are moving, some hymns make you want to dance. Encourage the children to think about their emotions as you play the hymns/songs.

• How does God make us feel when we sing/praise him?

Can You Guess?   age 6-12

You will need: popular secular songs and favourite hymns/Christian songs of the children.

Have lines from each song positioned around the room with some of the words missing.

In teams encourage them to go around and find out what the missing words are. First team to finish get extra points. Correct missing words also get points. Whichever team had the most points is the winner once everyone has finished.
Preparation

Ahead of the session remind the group to each bring a song or piece of music that they really enjoy or are moved by. You will also need a piece of instrumental music for the final activity.

Opening Activity

Begin today’s session with a group energizer. Have everyone stand in a circle and together create a group rhythm. One person starts creating a beat by clapping, stomping their feet and tapping their body. The group joins in and copies the movements and sounds. Give different members of the group an opportunity to lead the rhythm. There is a demonstration of how this works at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0ijU308gSc.

The Word

Read Psalm 150.

Explore with the group why they think music and worship is such a big part of church life.

• How might the use of songs and music in worship open us up to the divine?
• In what way does music help us feel and convey our emotions?

Activity/Discussion

Ahead of today’s session ask young people to bring along a song or piece of music that they like or something that moves them.

Spend some time listening to each of the tracks and invite the participants to say a few lines about why they like the song that they have chosen.

Living It Out

Play a piece of instrumental music without revealing the artist or song title.

Give the group the challenge of writing some words that would be appropriate for the emotions of the music. This does not have to scan with the metre of the music, it can be a more free flowing association of emotion with the music as a kind of soundtrack to it.

The music of Ludovico Einaudi would be very appropriate for this. His recent album “Elements” contains many tracks which could be used, such as “Petricor”. They have a simplicity and emotional heart which would work well.
Entering The Flow Of Praise

Welcome to one of the longer sentences there is in the Bible. What we read in the passage today is simply one sentence though it is far from being a simple sentence. It was a particular style of argument of the period. It does not really make sense as one sentence in English so it has been divided up into more manageable portions in our English translation and thus perhaps we might feel we ought to take one clause at a time in an attempt to explain or explore it. That may not, however, be the best way of reading this passage in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

The flow is important for it reads like a great piece of poetry, ideas sliding into other ideas in words shaped to praise God and our relationships with God through Jesus. The flow is important and is full of ready-made liturgical statements none of which is there to be explained in a sermon or pew discussion (leave that for the theology books), but is a stream of expressions that in some way connect us all through the relationship we have with God. We are picked up by them and are invited to join the flow of the stream of ideas.

Having said that, it would be a useful exercise to rewrite this passage as a contemporary litany, taking clauses and phrases and finding ways of saying them that are easier on the ears, if not the brain.

This is one great expression of how God blesses us all through Jesus and it might be more usefully expressed in the choice of hymns and the language of prayer rather than attempting to explain it methodically in a sermon. Cutting it up into individual words and phrases loses something of the poetry and flow.

Perhaps some questions that will help engage this passage are about the places where we find blessing. Where in our church life do we recognise the blessing of God: might it be in baptism or communion; might it be in the places where community is engaged and where we understand ourselves as ‘being in Christ’; might it be where we are blessed by others in the gifts of wisdom and experience?

One of the important insights to recognise is that when the writer speaks of ‘us’ he is speaking not to a group of individuals but to a community. This is not about individual salvation but the blessing that comes to a whole community. It is quite easy to re-translate all Paul’s letters as if he is speaking to individuals but Paul never does that: he is always addressing a community of believers.

The perspective in this passage is much wider and more universal than a list of what we should believe about God. It is about the whole relationship we enjoy with God and the blessings that come as a result of the love in which we are created. To analyse it too much misses the beauty of this great flow of ideas and moments that hold us in a relationship with God. It is less for understanding and more for expressing what it means to be ‘in Christ’. What that means flows out of the relationship we have with God rather than being able to understand all the separate elements.

This passage is a vision of what it is to be ‘in love’. Here there are no barriers, no prejudices, no limiting of life because of culture and tradition but the flowing life of a church that is ‘in Christ’, indeed a world that is ‘in Christ’. All will be one when Christ is proclaimed.
The Grand Entrance

To precede the reading of Ephesians 1:1-14.

Voice 1: What’s the bible reading for Sunday?
Voice 2: Hang on, I’ll have a look.
Voice 1: I think it’s from one of Paul’s letters.
Voice 2: Yes, It’s from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, chapter One.
Voice 1: Mmm.
Voice 2: Mmm what?
Voice 1: Isn’t that one of the letters that some people think that Paul didn’t actually write?
Voice 2: That Paul didn’t actually write? What do you mean?
Voice 1: Well, there’s a lot of letters in the New Testament that say that they’re written by Paul, but they might have been written by someone else.
Voice 2: Are you sure?
Voice 1: Well, nobody’s really sure but a lot of biblical scholars think that it makes sense.
Voice 2: What do you mean by ‘it makes sense’?
Voice 1: Well, things in Paul’s letters sometimes seem to contradict each other.
Voice 2: In one letter Paul seems to be comfortable with the idea of Christians owning slaves and in another letter he says that slaves and slave owners within the church should treat each other as equals.
Voice 1: I see. It makes more sense for two people to have written the letters than for Paul to be saying one thing in one letter and the opposite thing in another.
Voice 2: That’s right.
Voice 1: But why would someone write a letter and put Paul the Apostle’s name on it? Why pretend to be Paul?
Voice 2: It’s possible that some of the letters people wrote to the churches weren’t signed at all. No-one was sure who wrote them.
Voice 1: And somebody, years later, thought they sounded as if they came from Paul and added a bit to the letter to say that Paul wrote it?
Voice 2: It looks like it.
Voice 1: So, come Sunday, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians...
Voice 2: Or maybe a letter to the Ephesians, but not from Paul.
Voice 1: Let’s see what the minister has to say about it...

Retelling For Young People

A Mysterious Message

It was a mystery! There on the blackboard was a message and there was no sign of the class teacher!

The message said:

You are on your own this morning.
Here is what you must do.
Pages 14-23 in your maths book.
Pages 6 and 7 in your geography book.
Write a story about a missing teacher.
You are allowed to discuss your work with the people at your table.
If you have all finished your work by 11 o’clock you can go out into the playground at playtime.
You can do all these things without a teacher’s help.
Good Luck!

All sorts of things happened over the next two hours...
Table 6 sat at their desks, got out their books and worked at their maths and their geography. Boring!
Table 3 had a long discussion about who had written the message. Most people thought that it was from their teacher or their head teacher but no one was really sure about the handwriting.
Table 2 didn’t think that the message was from a teacher at all. They thought another pupil in the school had sneaked into their class room last night and written it up as a joke.
Table 5 came up with a long list of things that might have happened to their teacher including a bad cold, forgetting that it was a school-day, winning the lottery and being captured by aliens.
Table 1 read the message, posted a sentry on the door and got out their mobile phones and played games.
Table 4 wondered about rubbing the message off the board and pretending that it had never been there.

So who was the message from?
And why was it there?
And where was their teacher?
And if you had been in the classroom what would you have done?
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. The suggested image for this week is a photograph or picture of your church building / gathering space.

Give everyone a paper ‘brick’; an A5 sheet of paper would do but print these to look like bricks. Invite people to decorate their bricks (or simply write their names on them) as they wait for worship to begin. These could be gathered in during the first hymn and either as worship progresses have someone quietly building a wall with the ‘bricks’ or, they could be built into a wall ready to for next week.

OR give everyone a ‘Lego’ brick (or similar building blocks) and invite them to add their brick to an already half built ‘Lego’ church at the front of the church.

OR uses shoeboxes and build a bigger structure that will be the focal installation for the next few weeks.

Call to Worship

Forgiven...
loved...
free...

Let us hear the truth
and truly believe.

Let us worship God.

All-Age Prayer

Leader: Before time began
All: we were yours, Lord.

Leader: Before the world was made
All: we were yours, Lord.

Leader: Because of Jesus
All: we were yours, Lord.

Leader: Although we are different
All: we are yours, Lord.

Leader: No matter what happens
All: we will be yours, Lord.

Leader: ’Til beyond time
All: we will be yours.
Amen.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord God of a new morning,
and of all our days and nights,
we gather here to praise you
in sound and silence,
in story and song
with voices and hearts eager to know you
and to move a little closer to you.

Life giving God,
you have called us from many places,
along many roads
and through many histories
to this moment and place
that we might be reminded
of your faithfulness.
You have heard the songs of our souls,
mixed with tears and laughter,
burning with anger and shouting with joy
as we navigate life’s pathways
with you as our constant companion.
You have shared flesh with us,
known blood pulsing through your veins
and flowing from your wounds;
experienced death and isolation
so that you might know for yourself
our struggles and our sorrows.

You came back to us;
threw off the weight of dirt and stone,
to unearth a promise made before time,
and hand it to us, fresh and clean, and full of life.
And you have stayed with us, Lord,
even as our songs have fallen silent,
our minds have become closed
and our words have become sharp,
like a sword in your side.

Lord God, you have blessed us and freed us
from all our failures.
You have put your trust in us
that we might bring blessing and freedom
to others through your word.
May our voices always be praising you,
may our actions always be sharing you,
may our hearts always be open to you,
and may our lives be a living sacrifice to you
so that all may see and hear your glory.
Amen.
Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Lord Jesus,
at birth a refugee, in childhood an exile, in manhood rejected; Companion Lord, sitting with the outcasts, touching the untouchables, championing the cause of the hopeless; Saviour Lord, speaking out for the voiceless, confronting the hypocrites, suffering spit and nails for us, We give you thanks.

For, because of your example, we know that there is no place, no person, no situation you cannot see, you cannot reach. We know that the very edges of life, while they may be rough and uninviting, are the places where you tread.

Loving God, we are different people with different stories facing different worries, joys and trials but we do so as one, united in your love. And it is in such unity, Lord, that we offer these prayers for our brothers and sisters, near and far.

We pray for those crippled by life's worries: those thirsty for justice, those spurned because of creed or colour, those lacking vision and opportunity, those denied freedom of movement, those who have given up hope.

We pray they may know that you, Lord, have been where they are and that you have never left; that your compassion touches still in the hands, the words, the encouragement, the support of others.

You have promised, Lord, to always be with us. May we be strengthened by your words and your example that we might know for certain there is no place too far, no situation too impossible, no hurt too painful that you cannot find us and heal us.

Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Whoever we are, wherever we come from, whatever we bring, however much we offer, you welcome us as one, Lord.

Bless these gifts that united they may serve a single purpose—to bring life to your people and a glimpse of your kingdom here on earth. Amen.

Reflective Prayer

Give me peace, Lord. The vital peace which gives energy to the lifeless; the missing peace which waits to walk among the war-weary; the conversation peace which reconciles enemies; the party peace which gathers all to share as guests at your table; the piece of mind that is not afraid to say its peace.

Give me peace, Lord, as only you can.
Reflection

‘Grace and peace’:
a blessing before he begins.
Our letter writer, a brother in Christ.

Written to a church,
In a place once Greek,
now in Turkey.

But could this letter be for us?
What if Ephesus were right here?
What might an ancient writer have to say to us
that warrants us paying heed?

Blessed by Christ,
adopted as God’s own,
recipients of God’s glorious grace,
beloved of God,
redeemed by Christ’s blood,
Forgiven,
living in mystery,
to be gathered up with heaven and earth,
having the hope of Christ,
living to praise the glory of God,
readers of the Gospel of salvation,
marked by the Holy Spirit.

This is our inheritance
as God’s own people.
The ancients, us,
at one with Christ.
This timeless script,
passed down from
generation to generation.
Who will we pass it onto?

Take Home Ideas For The Week

What do we do that makes church different from other activities
we may be involved in? During worship over the next few weeks
we will be finding ways to know each other better.

When you return home continue that by getting to know your
neighbours, or neighbourhood. Find out or share a new thing
with family or friends.

Today you were given a brick. It may have been paper, or
"Lego" or even a shoe box. You may have started to create an
installation in church. This week reflect with your family or
friends on how we are all needed to make the church what it is.
We are all individuals, but together we make the whole. Thank
God for this world wide family that is the church.

Sending

Send us out, O God!
Out to show others of what we are made.
Out to build anew your kingdom.

Praise/Hymns

Come Gracious Spirit  CH4 587
Come Holy Ghost  CH4 586 / MP 90
Come Holy Spirit  CH4 589
Do not be afraid  CH4 191 / MP 115
Father God, I wonder  ATAS 55 / MP 128
Here in this place  CH4 623
How good is the God we adore  MP 244
Like fireworks in the night  CH4 548
May the God of peace go with us  CH4 786
May the mind of Christ my saviour  CH4 536 / MP 463
Now go in peace  CH4 789
Oh! Oh! Oh! how good is the Lord  ATAS 188 / MP 532
Praise God from whom all blessings flow  MP 557
Praise God from whom all blessings flow  CH 807, 808
She sits like a bird  CH4 593
The church is wherever God’s people are praising  CH4 522
The great love of God  CH4 358
age group ideas
gathering

Finders Sharers   all age

You will need: hide wrapped sweets around your gathering space.

Gather the children together in a circle and explain that they are going to have a treasure hunt where they have to find the sweets you have hidden around the room. However it is a treasure hunt with a difference because when they find one they must not keep it for themselves they must give it to someone who does not yet have one. Explain that when they have a sweet they should return to sit in the circle. Hopefully all of the children will return with a sweet, but have a spare you can share just in case!

Use this as a way into talking about blessings and blessing other people.

activities

Family Time   age 6-12

You will need: old magazines, old pictures of the children and their families (will need a message sent to parents during the week or the previous week), frieze paper/wall lining paper, glue, scissors, pens.

Use a large sheet of frieze paper or lining paper as the basis of a large collage. Cut out pictures and place them together in the picture to create a collage showing the diversity of God’s family, as outlined in today's bible passage. If you do not have pictures of the children that you can use encourage your children and young people to draw self portraits!

Read some verses from this week's bible passage and explain that we have all been chosen to be in God's family.

Count Your Blessings   all age

You will need: sunshine and outdoor space, paper and pens.

For many of us, with it being July, the weather should be warm today and your group of children and young people can get outside. In groups of various ages explore the outside space you have and encourage them to look around and write/draw their blessings down. See if the groups note down the same blessings!

Read through Ephesians and give emphasis to verse 3: “Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Maybe some of the older children and young people in your group may want to explore this verse more and work out what it means for them.

games

Lets Go Outside   age 3-5

You will need: outside space.

Play a game outside with your group of children. Depending on the space you have it could be a running around game like ‘Tig’ or if there is not much space a game where they have to behave like statues!

Let the children experience being outside in God’s creation. Let them count their blessings and thank God in their own way.

Happy Families   age 6-12

You will need: Pictures of different families from within your church. You could also use pictures of famous families. If that is not possible the children and young people could draw the families. If none of the above is possible why don’t you introduce them to the traditional card game “Happy Families”.

Place the individual pictures of the family members around the room, hide them in various places. Try to hide at least one member of the family in a place where it will be hard for them to find.

Time them in their groups to try and find the family they have chosen from the list of families that have been hidden. Explain if they find any other members of the other families on the list to leave them for the other groups to find.

See how long it takes them to find all the members of their family.

You can talk with the children about how God calls us to be a part of his family.
A Blessing To Give Away  age 3-8

You will need: a circle template approximately 14 cm in diameter, cotton or organza cloth, pinking shears, thin ribbon, wrapped sweets or sugared almonds, coloured card, hole punch, felt tip pens.

Prepare a cloth circle for each child by placing the template on the cloth and cutting around it using the pinking shears. Prepare a little rectangular label (5 cm by 3 cm) for each child using the coloured card and cutting it into a label shape using the pinking shears. Punch a hole in one end of the label. Give each child a label and ask them to draw a fancy border around the edges on both sides using the felt pens. Now give each child one of the cloth circles, a few sweets and a piece of thin ribbon. Ask them to thread one end of the ribbon through the hole in the label and place it to one side. Then to place the sweets in the centre of their circle of cloth. Show the children how to gather the cloth up neatly around the sweets and then tie it off using the piece of thin ribbon with the label attached.

Talk to the children about blessings and help them to understand what ‘blessings’ are by giving a few examples. Get them to look around them and think of how they are blessed in the world and in their life. Help them to not just identify ‘things’ but also people who are blessings to them too.

Talk about our blessings coming from God because he loves us and ask them to think about how we could bless others. Explain that the little gift they have made could be a blessing to someone and ask them to think about who they might like to bless with their gift. Ask them to write the name of the person or draw a picture of them on the label and then to give the gift to that person.

Book of Blessings  age 9-12

You will need: coloured paper cut into pieces 12 cm by 7 cm (about ten per child), coloured card 12 cm by 7 cm (two per child), felt pens, stick on stars, hole punch, thin ribbon.

First talk with the children about blessings and discuss the different ways they feel they are blessed. Ask them to consider if people could be a blessing too and if so who would be a blessing to them. Take it further and ask them to think about how they could be a blessing to others and what would they have to do to be a blessing. It could be really simple such as tidying their room, washing up the dishes, or visiting family or someone who is lonely.

Explain that they are going to create a ‘Book of Blessings’, rather like a coupon book or vouchers, which they can give to someone they wish bless. The person can then ask for the blessing whenever they wish.

Give each child about ten pieces of the coloured paper and ask them to decorate each one with a border like a voucher leaving a space in the middle for the written blessing. Encourage them to think of practical ways they could be a blessing and write one in the middle of each voucher. For example: ‘This voucher is worth one room tidy; ‘This voucher is worth one washing of the dishes; ‘This voucher is worth one car wash’. The Ideas will depend on who they plan to be the recipient.

Now give them two pieces of the card and allow them to decorate the front of their ‘Book of Blessings’ and then the back. Ask them now to combine them all together to make a book by punching holes at the left hand edge and then threading through a ribbon and tying it at the back. The book can then be given to someone they wish to bless who can tear out a voucher whenever they wish and present it to them in order to receive their blessing by action!

Balloon Blessings  all age

You will need: balloons, helium gas tank, string or ribbon, strips of paper, felt tip pens, coloured card, hole punch, scissors.

Talk with the children about blessings. Ask the children to look around them and see if they can identify some of the blessings around them. With older children the blessings they have in their lives. Make a list together of all the blessings they can identify. Talk about how people might feel if we shared our blessings with them so that they might feel blessed too.

Now giving the children a strip of paper each, ask them to write a blessing they would like to share on it. Give them a piece of card and ask them to design a small label and to put on it the words “Please burst the balloon: a blessing to someone!” Let them punch a hole in one end of their label and thread the string or ribbon through it and put it to one side. Now ask them to roll up the strip of paper with their blessing on it and show them how to place the blessing inside the balloon by opening the neck of the balloon slightly and pushing the paper inside. They should then blow up the balloon with the helium gas, tie the neck with the string attached to the label.
Preparation

For the Opening Activity you will need paper and pens.

For the Activity/Discussion we will be rewriting the passage. You will need the one copy of the worksheet on page 112 for each young person. If you wish a different version of the bible then just create your own version. The Bible Notes for this week have some great thoughts behind why we are doing this activity so please read them as preparation for the session. This worksheet can also provide the young people with the reading for today, if you wish (though it misses out the introductory few verses).

For Living It Out you may want to have some books of blessings for young people to look through as they consider how and who they can bless.

Opening Activity

Count Your Blessings

This week we are thinking about blessings. To get into this theme we will play a game “Count Your Blessings”.

Everyone take a piece of paper and a pen. You will have one minute to think about the word blessings. And write down as many different phrases or ways blessings are seen in the world. It may be song titles, names of people you know, things that have happened to you film titles, common phrases or even things from a shop. At the end of the minute we will compare lists and see what variety is represented by everyone in the group.

The Word

Read Ephesians 1:1-14 together.

Activity/Discussion

Within this passage we have what in effect is a lyrical call to be ‘in God’. This morning encourage everyone to rewrite this as a group activity for each other. Use the focus of reminding each other about when we are ‘in God’ (in other words, living close to God’s Way) and where we find blessings. You may want to encourage this rewriting of the passage to be in the form of a song or poem, however free-flowing that needs to be.

Depending on time, you may wish to divide the group into smaller sub groups, asking each group of writers to start at different point in the passage.

- Have a think about how you would reword the ideas within the passage?
- What concepts or ideas in the reading do you think are the most important?
- What concepts or ideas in the reading are new to you?
- Where do you find these blessings in life or church?
- Has a person or group of people ever been a blessing to you or your church?

Once each group has written something share where you have got to.

Living It Out

The blessings of God come to those who follow God. But as humans the bible speaks of us offering blessings to one another. Author John O’Donohue encourages us to rediscover our ability to bless each other. This changes the atmosphere: “In the light and reverence of blessing a person or situation become illuminated in a completely different way.”

Take a moment and note down a person or a situation where you can offer a blessing over the week to come. Pray for them just now and over this week see if you can bless them this week.

If you have some books on blessings, it may be worth inviting the young people to look through them at this point. You may wish to play a song about blessings during this time. Chance the Rapper’s song “Blessings” from the album Colouring Book would be a particularly good fit.
I is there any other institution on the planet bigger and more diverse and inter-generational than the church? If there is, few of us have heard of it, yet this reality of being a body of people who are rich in their diversity and wisdom and faith seems often to be more of a problem to us than a cause of celebration. Back in Paul’s time when the human population was a tiny fraction of the size it is now, we still struggled to cope with the gift of diversity. The letter to the Ephesians takes up the issue in that culture but we can relate all too well today.

Paul’s premise is that God has formed a new humanity, bringing us together from different ends of the cultural and political spectrum in order to make us one in Christ. Paul’s focus is on Jew and Gentile and the great battle raging in the early church about who was invited into the faith. Paul won that particular battle and the church became universal. Contemporary versions of the same argument are still raging and we can hardly say we are reconciled to each other through Jesus.

Reconciliation leads to peace. It is neither war nor law that achieves peace but rather reconciliation. That is our starting point in the church: reconciliation—a recognition that in Christ we are all in the same boat. No one is more expert or closer to Jesus than anyone else, circumcised or not. Paul recognises such peaceful diversity is how the kingdom is shaped. It is not that everyone believes the same thing or expresses their faith or belonging in an identical way. Jew does not become Gentile and Gentile does not become Jew. Both become ‘one in Christ’.

This might be radical enough but the consequences are even more so. The Church is now set up as a corrective to all empires that are forged on the basis of insiders and outsiders with an elite that controls the choices available to everyone else. The cynic could say that this feels awfully like the church at times but it should be anathema to the Church, if the church is operating ‘in Christ’. The Church is the opposite of Empire. There is a significant context here: normally it is the Pax Romana that keeps the peace of empire. This letter, written within the context of the Roman empire, shifts the whole political foundation and says now, Christ is your peace and not the Pax Romana. This is almost treason especially as the one identified as Prince of Peace is the one the Empire crucified. Hearing that claim, you would be looking over your shoulder to see if anyone else had overheard.

In such a context the idea of church shifts from being a pause in the week where we have some time for ourselves to recharge our batteries to the encouragement to adopt the idea that the Church crosses all the borders that Empire and State set up to keep us divided from each other through economy, power and wealth. The Church should be the political reality of the cross. At its best it brings us all together through the One whom the State tried to eliminate.

Being part of the Church, where there are circumcised and uncircumcised and all the various realities for which that differentiation becomes a metaphor, is trusting this power of unity. It is power that undermines all the borders and walls that others create, finding ourselves closer to each other than any other institution is able to bring us. And as walls are undermined by a search for unity we live closer to the peace that is Christ.

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**The Institution Of Peace**

Ephesians 2:11-22

(Matthew 28:16-20)
This Is The Church

This is the church: the invitation, the participation, the collaboration—

the young and the old,
the grown up, the grown bold;

the listeners, the learners, dependents and earners;

those who went to university, left school at fourteen, with stress or mess or success in between;

those who read the Guardian, the Times, the stars and between the lines;

lovers and haters of Marmite, Mondays, Facebook and Fun Days;

the inventive, inquisitive, invisible, competitive;

nine to fivers, shift workers, students, sessional workers, spendthrifts and prudents;

those getting by on a living wage, on pensions, on bonus pay, on benefits, financial tensions;

computer geeks and technophobes, luddites, socialites, hermaphrodites, suburbanites;

the politically active, inactive, apathetic, engaged, enraged, or apoplectic;

the meditators, agitators, commentators, procrastinators;

the book worms, TV addicts, coach potatoes and gym fanatics;

rough it outdoors campers, luxurious glampers, lovers of salmon sandwich hampers or weekend spa pampers;

those who pray on the hoof, or by the book, who long for proof, or need a hook;

the left brainers, right brainers, lion tamers, green campaigners;

the sprinters, plodders, hobblers and odd-jobbers.

This is the church: the invitation, the participation, the collaboration—

to be part of the mix
is no picnic, no quick fix;
to rub each other up the wrong way, but rub shoulders for the long way;
together, forever,
in every weather.

This is the church: the invitation, the participation, the collaboration—
to get things done, to have fun, follow the Son, till Kingdom come, to be one, to be one, to be one.

Retelling For Young People

Worst Thing, Best Thing?

It was tea and coffee time after church, and Alex and Robin were sitting in the church café. Alex looked around at all the others who were there and said, “Do you know the worst thing about church? There’s nobody here who’s just like me!” Robin looked around too and had to agree. There was nobody quite the same as Alex. “Just think about it,” Alex went on, “everyone says my family all look a bit the same. When I’m at school, everyone in my class is the same age as me. When I see my neighbour Jason at work at Sainsbury’s, all the staff are wearing the same uniform. At football club, everyone loves football. My grandma loves his reading group because he knows all the people there love reading. My mum likes the Parent and Toddler group because she meets lots of other parents and can talk about lots of mum and dad stuff. Everywhere we go to, there’s something the same about the people! But not church. There’s nobody here just like me.”

Robin thought for a moment. “But we’re friends, aren’t we, Alex? Even though we’re not the same. You’re 8 and I’m 48! We’ve known each other for five years now! Did you know that at first I didn’t like you?”

“What?” asked Alex, seeing a twinkle in Robin’s eye.

“Well,” said Robin, “You were three years old when we first met. You ran around a lot. You were really quite noisy in church! I used to scowl at your dad! I wished someone would make you sit still and be quiet!”

Alex laughed. “So then what happened? Did you and my dad fall out?”

“No!” laughed Robin. “Thank goodness we didn’t. No, you and your dad helped me to learn that being noisy and wriggly in church is fine! Letting you be yourself was the best way to welcome you, and get to know you. I started playing games with you sometimes, do you remember?”

“Yes! One day you said you’d listened better to the minister because we were building Lego while she was talking!”

“Oh dear,” said Robin, feeling a bit embarrassed, “Do you remember that? But it was true! Maybe I should build Lego in church more often! But you see, Alex, at first I thought that because you were nothing like me, we would never like each other.”

Alex thought about it, and was very glad to be friends with Robin, even though they were two very different people.

Then Alex thought about Robin and said, “But there’s nobody here who’s just like you, Robin! Nobody who’s your age, or who lives near you, or who does the same kind of job as you, or who has no family and isn’t married, like you. Don’t you think that’s the worst thing about church?”

“No,” said Robin wisely. “I think that’s the best thing about church. Where else can I meet and make friends with so many people who aren’t just like me, and learn to understand each other and do things together. Sometimes it’s a challenge, but it’s great!”

“Maybe,” said Alex.

“Come on,” Robin got up, “Let’s have another cup of tea. There are still some Custard Creams left!”
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. The suggested image for this week is the same as last week: a photograph or picture of your church building / gathering space.

To celebrate the diversity of everyone present, invite them to play People Bingo. This will involve preparing a sheet with 12 different things that people might not know about each other, for example: like crime fiction, has a cat, has a dog, has a tattoo, has been to city. The idea is to mingle and find people that meet each category. With some inside knowledge you could include some quite ‘unique’ categories. Include all ages in this activity.

OR, if you began building a church in the previous week, let people add another brick this week.

Call to Worship

Leader: There is no ‘them’ and ‘us’,
All: there is only us.
Leader: We are not a chosen few,
All: we are all part of God’s family.
Leader: We gather as one,
All: let us worship God together.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord God,
the majesty of your creation
leaves us breathless with wonder.
Every day we marvel at fresh discoveries.
Stars, older than imagination can embrace,
appear within the galaxy.
Creatures who have long walked the earth
or explored the oceans
choose to reveal themselves.
Awesome wonders in hidden places
of the planet
allow us a glimpse of their beauty.
And yet, Lord, we see only
a tiny part of the universe
you have created.
Our little piece of the world
reminds us we are part of something bigger.

Yet too often we believe that our small corner
is the most important because we live in it.
We guard it jealously,
we deny entry to others,
we fail to open ourselves
to your Holy Spirit
that you might become our world,
people in whom others recognise
your beauty and your glory.

Forgive us our need to own you, Lord.
And when we would force you
into our small corner
help us to follow you into the great wide open
to be places of welcome and refuge.
In Jesus’ name.
Amen.

All-Age Prayer

For this prayer, have ‘building blocks’ such as garden Jenga blocks or shoeboxes. Write the relevant words on each one and, as they are brought forward build a ‘wall’. At the end of the prayer, the wall is knocked down.

Lord God,
you have made us to live in community
but we create division.

‘Division brick’ is laid down
You have asked us to live in love
but too often we show hatred.

‘Hate brick’ is laid down.
You will us to be accepting of those who are different
but so often we are intolerant.

‘Intolerance brick’ is laid down.
You wish all your people to live in harmony
but all around us we see bitterness.

‘Bitterness brick’ is laid down.
You came to bring the world peace
but countries and people continue to be at war.

‘Conflict brick’ is laid down.
You showed us the joy of serving others
but too often we put ourselves first.

‘Selfishness brick’ is laid down.
You offer us forgiveness
but we are slow to forgive one another.

‘Resentment brick’ is laid down.
Loving God,
remind us of your call to build a kingdom
founded on justice and developed in love.

‘Wall’ is knocked down.
Destroy all that separates us from you and from one another
and make us worthy workers in your service.
Amen.
Prayers for Others and Ourselves

In the beauty of creation
is a glimpse of your glory, Lord.
In our relationships with family and friends
is a sign of your love.
In our fellowship here in this place
is a mark of our commitment
to live and share our faith.
And so we thank you, Lord,
for the promise on a hillside
which has guided and comforted us
on our life's journey however long or short.

Knowing you are with us always,
with us now in this place
we pray for our world
and the people around us;
a world not always patient and kind;
people in need of nurturing and care.
We pray for your kingdom to reach them
right where they are
to open up new, life-giving opportunities,
to bring growth and fruitfulness.

For not everyone is strong, God,
so we ask that you support them.
Not everyone is rich,
so we ask that you provide for them.
Not everyone is happy,
so we ask that you give them cause to smile.
Not everyone has family and friends,
so we ask that you be their companion.
Not everyone is healthy,
so we ask that you bring healing.
Not everyone is treated fairly,
so we ask that you stand up for them.

Help us, in our care for one another,
to share your story—
a story that took root in the earthiness
of people's lives
and gave them strength and courage.
A story of a love that made
the most ordinary people
believe they could do extraordinary things
because Jesus laughed and cried with them
and blessed them.
Help us to be part of your everlasting promise
that our story might reflect
the good news of your kingdom
wherever you call us.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Living in love demands more, Lord,

than money, however rich we may we.
Following your son Jesus calls us to stretch
beyond our goodness and our charity,
beyond our generosity,
to discover reserves we did not know existed,
to tread paths that are unfamiliar,
to receive as well as give,
in ways we never imagined.

As we commit our offering,
may we recommit our lives
in selflessness and service
to the glory of your kingdom.
Amen.

Reflective Prayer

A drop in the ocean.

Silent and small,
the slightest touch
unnoticed, insignificant.

And look!
A tiny movement,
timid at first
then growing, spreading,
shifting, stirring,
ripple after ripple
sending messages
that transformation can happen
not simply on the surface
but deep down
in the stagnant places.

Lord, help me to believe
that the little I can do
might cause the great changes you seek.
Reflection

Universe
Solar System
Planet
Continent
Country
County
City,
Town
Village
Hamlet
Home
Family
Self.
God.
In all.
From the vastness of the universe
to the intimacy of relationship.
No-one excluded.
Each of us different.
Yet united.
No longer strangers,
but friends that have yet to meet.
How much more peaceful a world
If only we could live this truth.

Responsive Activity

You will need: six long lengths of coloured cotton material,
chalk. Place these in different parts of the worship area with lots
of chalk. For the material a bed sheet cut in long strips would
be perfect, stapled together in long lengths. As many different
colours as possible would be great.

Invite people to think of something they have inherited from
the church. It may be a hymn, or a skill, or an idea or a feeling.
Invite them to reflect on that.

Then invite people to think of something they would like to
pass on to a different generation. It may be again a hymn,
action, hope, or skill.

Once they have thought of both these two things, invite them to
come out and with chalk, write one of those things on one strip
of material and the other on a different strip of material.

Once everyone has done this bring the different strands
Together and reciting one of the prayers provided or creating
your own about diversity and unity and working together with
all our gifts, have a few volunteers tangle the strands together.
They could be woven, or pleated or tied with knots or simple
bundled together like a tangle of wool all depending on what
kind of image you would like to make of the church.

Give thanks for the different gifts that make up your community
that have been received and wish to be passed one and offer
the tangle of material as a symbol of thanksgiving for the

Take Home Ideas For The Week

We are all made in the image of God, yet we are all also unique.
This week look at your family. Maybe find some old photos of
grandparents and great grandparents.

- What unites you?
- What makes you distinctive?
- When you look at the church family to which you belong,
  what unites us?
- What makes us different?

Thank God for the person who unites us best: Jesus.

Sending

Send us out, O God!
United in love for you,
united as your holy people,
united together in you.

Praise/Hymns

As a fire is meant for burning CH4 252
Bind us together, Lord ATAS 27 / MP 54
Christ is made the sure foundation CH4 200 / MP 73
Come, thou long-expected Jesus CH4 472 / MP 102
For I’m building a people of power ATAS 65 / MP 151
‘For my sake and the gospel’s, go’ CH4 248
God is building a house MP 184
Hévénu shalom MP 231
Holy Spirit, ever living CH4 615
In Christ there is no east or west CH4 624 / MP 329
Jesus calls us here to meet him CH4 510
Jesus put this song into our hearts MP 376
Jesus stand among us MP 381
Just as I am CH4 553 / MP 396
Let us build a house CH4 198
O Lord, all the world belongs to you ATAS 183 / SGP 84
O thou, who at thy Eucharist didst pray CH4 669
Rejoice the Lord is king CH4 449 / MP 575
The great love of God is revealed in the Son CH4 358
We lay our broken world CH4 721
age group ideas
gathering

Coming Together  all age
Play a game where everyone runs around as individuals trying to avoid each other and then when you call out a number they have to gather together in groups that contain that number of children as quickly as they can.
Use this as a way into the story for this week and to think about how individuals can come together.

activities

Keep On Building  all age
You will need: Lego bricks, Duplo blocks or equivalent.
Encourage all the group to work together to create a lot of different buildings or structures, never quite finishing it. Perhaps give each group a few minutes to work on theirs, then have the groups rotate around and start adding to one of the other group’s initial buildings. They are creating something that is never finished. Or challenge different groups to build different parts of one larger model. How big can they make it?

As the models are created chat with the children about how the Church itself is constantly adapting and being built by different people all responding to the needs of the community and people who live in it. It is much more about the people than any building that they create to help them carry out their work.

games

Dress Up  age 3-5
You will need: dress up clothes (include dress up clothes of people who serve us such as fire, police, doctors).
Encourage the children to dress up in the different outfits and ask them what kind of things they might do to help other people if they were in the role represented by their outfits.
Talk about how even though we may all look different on the outside, no matter how we look we are called by God to serve and to look after each other.

Sound Map  age 6-12
You will need: paper, pens (and attentive listening ears).
Take your group of children outside your hall. Invite them to sit and listen to what is around them in their community.
Ask them to draw or write on their piece of paper images representing what they hear.
- What noises do you hear in our community?
- What are the most common sounds in our community and where we live?
- What sounds are natural sounds?
- What sounds are made by humans?
No matter what their community is like it is a blessing from God.
Crafts

Breaking Down Walls  age 3-8

You will need: marshmallows (flat ones if possible but would work with regular round ones or indeed Custard Cream biscuits), plastic tablecloth and paper plates.

Give the children a quantity of marshmallows (or Custard Creams biscuits) each and ask them to use them to build a wall between them and their nearest neighbour.

Talk with the children about walls, why we have them and how they can divide people and places. Discuss what could happen if walls were taken down. Talk about the Story Retelling for Young People and how sometimes people make or imagine 'walls' between them which seem to divide them like Alex and Robin. Talk about how they got to know each other better and how that brought them together as friends.

Ask the children to take down their walls and then to build something new together before then sharing the marshmallows or Custard Creams.

From Walls To Unity  age 9-12

You will need: gummed paper squares of approximately 2 cm size in a variety of colours, A4 sized coloured paper, strip of frieze paper, a variety of peace and unity symbols or illustrations.

Give each child a piece of A4 paper and ask them to lay it down in landscape orientation and then ask them to lay out the squares like mosaic tiles—without sticking them down—to represent a wall on their paper.

Talk with the children about walls, why we have them and how they can divide people and places. Talk with them about this week’s Story Retelling and how sometimes people make or imagine 'walls' between themselves which can seem to divide them like Alex and Robin. Discuss what they think might happen if walls, whether real or imaginary, were taken down. Look at some peace symbols together and then talk about how taking down walls can sometimes help to bring about unity and peace between people and countries.

Ask them to take apart the individual walls they have designed and then to work together on the frieze paper, using their squares, to either design their own unity and peace symbol or to copy one of the symbols you have provided. When they are happy with their design they should then co-operate and stick the squares down onto the paper.

Coming Together  all age

You will need: paper plates, tissue paper, aluminium foil, wool in a variety of hair colours, scissors, PVA glue, glue spreaders, felt tip pens, colouring pencils, length of frieze paper.

Give each child a paper plate and ask them to ‘do’ a self-portrait using the materials provided.

Look together at the children’s portraits and talk about them and how none of them are the same, every one being different. Talk with the children about the Story Retelling and how Alex and Robin thought they were very different people yet they were good friends. Ask the children to think of ways they are different from their family or friends or the people meeting in their group that day. Talk about how they might all be different but how they are all the same in one way because they are a group together and they all love Jesus.

Make a group portrait by putting all their individual self-portraits together as a group onto the frieze paper and display in your space.
discussion starters for teens
where are the walls?

Preparation
For the Opening Activity you will need some building blocks. You might be able to borrow some from your church’s nursery cupboard or a family with young children may have a box of two of these things that you can borrow and give back after use.

For the Activity/Discussion you will need three maps, one of the local area, one of the lay out of the church and grounds, and one of the local high school and grounds. The young people will be asked to draw on these maps so please ensure that is okay to do so or photocopy the maps so they can write on the copies.

For Living It Out we have a short blessing to say to each other. You may wish to print it out, or display it on a wall for all to see.

Opening Activity
We’re Gonna Build A Wall
Give everyone access to a big box of construction blocks. Give everyone five minutes to build the best wall they can collectively create. If you are borrowing the blocks, then thankfully, you will not have to worry about who is going to pay for the wall...

The Word
Read Ephesians 2:11-22 together. The Message version of this reading is particularly helpful for making it understandable. It can be readily found on http://www.biblegateway.com.

Activity/Discussion
Divide the young people you work with into three groups, if possible. Give each group one set of coloured pens (one group has all blue, one group has all red, one group has all green). Give each group a map.

1. Ask each group to mark where they are excluded physically on the map. (Under 18’s not permitted for example.)
2. After a few moments ask each group to swap their map with the next group.
3. Ask each group to mark where they are excluded based on their thoughts or beliefs. (A place where people think differently from them.)
4. After a few moments ask each group to swap their map with the next group.
5. Ask each group to mark where there are borders or walls between people? (These can be physical or notional.)

Gather all the maps and leave them on the floor for all to see.

• Do you think the walls and borders we experience are different for a child, an adult or an elderly person?
• What is that difference?
• The bible reading says Jesus has come to break down the wall and borders, and the church is the way we do that.
• How could church help you do this better?
• Do you think they can be broken down?

Living It Out
We live it out by thinking about the walls we built at the beginning. We think about the walls on the ground. As we sit and look at the maps we pray together by saying the following blessing to each other.

You belong here,
in Christ we end the fighting between us,
in Christ we have peace between us,
in Christ we are made new people,
in Christ you belong here,
members of this house,
as fellow citizens,
with Christ Jesus himself,
where God dwells through his Spirit:
you belong here.

discussion starters for teens
where are the walls?
Living As A Faithful Community

A common practice among many churches in the 1990s and 2000s was an engagement by the church leadership in determining a Purpose Statement and/or Mission Statement. While it would not be fair to say it was a fad of the time, nonetheless it hit a certain need at that time. While many of these statements were subsequently left to gather dust, for some congregations they did genuinely provide some helpful direction to their mission and service.

Whether Paul would be a fan of such devices or not, the principle of focusing a congregation on what really matters to them and for them to understand those values and work it out in their lives was definitely something he was most interested in assuring. Ultimately, of course, those values were rooted in the values of God, as revealed to us by Jesus.

At the start of chapter four of Ephesians we get a big "therefore". After the supportive and pastoral parts of this letter, his extended prayer on behalf of the church in Ephesus, we now turn to the more practical instructions for the faith community.

In these first sixteen verses this instruction is to bring clarity to the nature of a community of faith: that it is not a collection of isolated beings, but rather a network of connected individuals who together comprise something much more than merely the sum of their parts. Paul does not hold back, he exhorts or begs the Ephesians to hear what he has to say: this is how important he considers this knowledge for them to grasp. We must assume, as this was surely pretty self-evident to this young Christian community, that there were some problems in this area.

The exhortation to be humble and gentle, patient and tolerant, all speak of a need to rein in some who were either taking advantage of others or dominating the community in an unhealthy manner. Would that this had only been an issue for the church in Ephesus in the mid first century? Of course, we know all about similar issues amongst Christian communities today. This message is as relevant and prescient today as it was then.

This leads Paul into a wonderful succinct confession that hints at the Trinity yet centred around the unity of God and the unity of faith in that God amongst all who are called to follow (v. 4-6).

At verse seven we then get another shift with a big "however". Paul is developing his argument. After speaking about the essential unity of the faithful followers of Christ, he now goes on to address the reality of the church: that it comprises a rich smorgasbord of individuals with many different gifts and talents to offer. He develops his metaphor of the body to describe the church here from that which we find in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Here we get the additional image of Jesus as the head of the church, an image missing from the other two explorations of this helpful metaphor.

The special gift or grace that is mentioned in verse seven is most likely a reference to the triumph of Christ over the powers of his enemies, and this gift is then embodied in the ministries of the apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors and evangelists. All of these roles not existing for their own sake, but rather to build up the body of Christ, equipping others for service. It is a continual cycle of growth towards spiritual maturity, but not just of the individual, it is a corporate maturity, recognising that alone we cannot reach that maturity that being in communion with each other provides. As occasions arise, that means speaking the truth in love, but always remembering the attributes with which Paul started this chapter: humility, gentleness, patience...
The Gift Giver

In whatever circumstance you find yourself, whether in prison like the apostle Paul, or busy climbing the career ladder, or starting your first job, whether in the twilight of your life or just at the beginning, be kind and gentle to the people around you. Treat them as your friends.

Create strong ties to bind us together, remember we are the people of God sharing one faith, one God, one baptism; our foundation stones for building the Kingdom of God together.

Remember that God is the gift giver, the one who equips us with skills to serve, words of hope and inspiration for preachers, insight and vision for the prophets, gentleness and compassion for the pastors, good news to share for the evangelists, spiritual insight for the people of prayer, financial acumen for our treasurers, selfless commitment for our members, openness to learning like our children, so that together we stand and fall as the people of God together.

Remember it is God who nourishes us in our faith, who feeds us from the fruit of the vine and quenches our thirst with his life giving waters. It is God who nurtures us from the cradle to the grave, and whose strength alone enables us to stand against all things that the world might possibly throw at us.

Each day with God can be a new day of learning and understanding and spiritual growth. Enabling us to become peacemakers and justice seekers.

Retelling For Young People

Stand Up

List the gifts and talents you think your young people might have, asking them to stand if they think they have that gift or ability, so that everyone is eventually standing. Once you have everyone on their feet remind them that all of them are loved by God and together help to form the kind of Christian community Paul is talking about here in Ephesians.

Stand up if you think you are a kind person?
Stand up if you are sometimes a gentle person?
Stand up if you care for your friends?
Stand up if you love someone in your family?
Stand up if you like to sing a song when no one is listening?
Stand up if you are good at remembering things?
Stand up if you have a nice smile for other people?
Stand up if you are good at building things?
Stand up if you are good at fixing things?
Stand up if you are good at explaining things?
Stand up if you try to help other people?
Stand up if...

You are all God’s people!
Loved by him,
cared for by him,
made by him,
called by him
to work together
In building God’s kingdom.

You are a child of God
and you belong to Jesus Christ,
and you work for Jesus Christ,
and you matter to Jesus Christ.

Together we can all make a difference to the people who are here today, and the people in our school, or in our town, or in the places to which we might travel. We can be the children of God anywhere!
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. The suggested image for this week is the same as last week: a photograph or picture of your church building / gathering space.

Give every one a paper body part and encourage them to add their body part to an outline body you have placed on a wall/ table top. Keep this simple. The following link takes you to a very simple outline that could be used, although a search on the internet will find many others (http://fromabcstoacts.com/head-shoulders-knees-and-toes).

OR, if you began building a church in the previous weeks, let people add another brick this week.

Call to Worship

As we gather to worship God this day may God’s word help us to grow, may Christ’s love humble us and may the Spirit gently challenge us.

All-Age Prayer

Apostles,
Prophets,
Evangelists,
Shepherds,
Teachers,
Lots of big words for ordinary people.

Lord, show us, whatever age we are how to use the gifts you have given us, how to be Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, Teachers for you. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

God, you call us all to different roles with a unity of purpose.

May we, along with these our offerings, work together to build your kingdom. Amen.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God we thank you that you created each of us uniquely and in each of us is planted the image of you. As we worship you here, we praise you that, without each other, your body is diminished; without each other, the praise we offer is lessened; without each other, our prayers lack completeness.

So, as we take our place in worship, we give you thanks for one another: for those with whom we get along and for those whom we find difficult, for those in whom we see your love and for those in whom we see hurt or despair or indifference.

Lord, in our seeing, give us compassion. And help us to see beyond the surface to your likeness in every one.

For all the times this week that we have looked at others and refused to see you in them, forgive us.

For all the times we’ve tried to hide our true selves from those around, forgive us.

For all the times we have imagined ourselves as ranking higher in your kingdom, forgive us.

Forgive us and shake us down into the space you have made for us, beloved children, who have a place in your heart, in your church and in your world.

And, renewed by that insight, help us to shuffle over and make room for others whom you too call beloved. Amen.

Reflective Prayer

God, you offer us so many ways to serve, you offer us so many ways to be.

Offer us, too, the will to discern the unique part you want us to play whether apostle or prophet, or evangelist, or shepherd, or teacher.

Help us to find a way to develop the gifts you have given us and to serve you in all the wonder with which you created us.
worship ideas

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Lord, help us to live out your word:
with humility,
with gentleness,
with patience,
with love,
honouring and upholding unity and peace
through the grace of God.

May we live out your word in the world
in every place where we see your children suffer.

May we rejoice when your people are blessed.

May we do this in the grace you have given us,
grace that can overcome all manner of adversity,
grace that inspires and sustains
your gift for us that helps to unite us in love.

Amen.

Reflection

Mature—
all grown up.

Knowing that another’s difference
does not undermine my uniqueness
nor my value.

Knowing that diversity
need not diminish unity,
difference
need not diminish togetherness,
More than that—
Knowing that, together,
we enhance,
affirm
and embolden one another
to embrace our difference
and to find strength
in the completeness
we lend to one another.

Take Home Ideas

Continuing on from last week’s idea thinking about what
unites us and what makes us unique, this week focus on
the part we play. It may be obvious: choir member, worship
leader, children’s leader. It may be less obvious: children for
the Sunday Club; members of the congregation. If any was not
there then church would be less united. Pray about your role not
only in church, but in your home and family: whether a senior
member or the baby, each has a special place and the family
would miss you. Thank God for every part of your family.

Sending

Send us out, O God!
Each one of us part of your body,
each one of us important,
known and loved.

Praise/Hymns

Baptized in water CH4 636
Bind us together, Lord MP 54
Christ is made the sure foundation CH4 200 / MP 73
Eternal ruler of the ceaseless round CH4 269
‘Forgive our sins as we forgive’ CH4 486
God of all peoples, cultures and nations
online at http://carolynshymns.com/god_of_all_peoples.html

Help us forgive, forgiving Lord CH4 693
I greet thee, who my sure Redeemer art CH4 455
It’s me, it’s me, lit’s me that builds community ATAS 135
Like fireworks in the night CH4 584
Like the murmur of the dove’s song CH4 592
Lord of the church MP 442
One is the body CH4 679
Put peace into each other’s hands CH4 659
The Church’s one foundation CH4 739 / MP 640
The Lord ascendeth up on high CH4 440
The Lord is King! lift up your voice! CH4 129 / MP 656
We know that Christ is raised CH4 635
When the bonds of love are breaking CH4 690
You formed us in your image, Lord
online at http://carolynshymns.com/you_formed_us_in_your_image_lord.html

Your hand, O God, has guided CH4 511 / MP 705
age group ideas gathering

Join The Body all age

You will need: prepare a large body shape either from paper or sheeting (just large enough to hold everyone in your group so that they require to really squeeze together to all get on), facility to play music.

Play a game together where music is played and when it stops everyone has to get onto the body shape as quickly as possible with no parts of their body over the edge of the outline. You can try it a few times.

Talk about everyone having to come together as one body and use this as a way into the story.

Ascending/Descending age 3-5

If your premises allows it, take the children on a walk through the building and around the grounds that require them to walk up and down stairs so that they are ascending and descending. Count the number of steps walked, how many stairs/steps climbed up and down. If you have no stairs then bring in some small stools for the children to stand on or climb over as an assault course.

With the children go through the numbers in front of you and also on your fingers. Mix the numbers up and then ask the children to put numbers 1,2,3 in ascending order and then 7,8,9 in descending order. The same can be done with letter of the alphabet which you can then make into their names. Do all the letters in their name ascend or descend in the right order or are they all mixed up?

Up The Ladder all age

You will need: snakes and ladders board, counters, dice.

To emphasise the language of ascending and descending, a game of snakes and ladders would be appropriate.

My Gifts age 6-12

You will need: images of people the children will know both from the church and from the secular world.

Discuss with the children what gift God has given each of the people in the images. They might be a singer, linguist, baker, gymnast, musician, painter, architect, mechanic, cleaner, talker, carer. Each person has been given a gift by God including all the children. Try to find out from the children what their gift might be. Is there a possibility of the children using the gifts they each have to work together to bring something fruitful in God’s Kingdom? Ideas might be to put on a mini show, visit a care home and entertain, invite people for food and drink. Discuss with the children what they would like to do with their lives as they grow older.

What Is More Difficult age 6-12

You will need: images to accompany the different activities, a list of activities (trying to find some that are relevant to your situation).

Ask the children their thoughts on the following ascending and descending activities and why they would rank them the way they do. Examples might be: mountaineering, crossing large sand dunes, counting, reciting the letters of alphabet, surfing a huge wave, running a hill, singing Doh to Doh, ladders. Ascending does not always mean better and descending is not always worse. Ask the children to point out the benefits of Christ ascending and the benefits when he descended to earth again.

Unity all age

You will need: dictionary, paper, pens.

This activity will need to be in a simpler format for the younger children. It is based on working in unity.

Talk to the children about the word ‘unity’. Ask the older children to look it up in the dictionary or online. The children can either draw or write down their family unit (mum, dad, sister, brother, gran, being aware these will be varied). They work together as a family and each person has their gifts while working together. Make sure they include themselves within the unit as they are vital to it.

Next ask the children to draw or write down the unit within the church (minister, organist, church leaders, Sunday Club leaders, treasurer, members) and talk about how they also use their gifts while working together. Make sure they include themselves within the unit as they are vital to it.

What about the unity of plants and animals: they rely on each other to survive. Finally think about how we need to work in unity with God’s Creation.
One Body

You will need: dark coloured A4 card, a variety of pasta shapes (fusilli, penne, macaroni, orecchiette, gemelli and such like), PVA glue, glue spreaders.

Give each child a piece of card and ask them to firstly lay out a body shape—rather like a skeleton—using the pasta shapes to create the body. When they are happy with the body they have created ask them to glue each piece of pasta to the card individually. Encourage the children to use quite a lot of glue to ensure the pasta sticks.

Talk with the children about the different shapes they have used to make up the one body. Talk with them about their story and about all the different gifts and talents they have which make them all different. Discuss how even though they are all different they are also all the same in one way because they are all loved by God. Talk about how when they come together and share all their gifts and talents they can be like a body or group. Ask them to think about how they could share their gifts and talents as ‘one body’ to show others that God loves them too.

Colourful Bodies

You will need: A4 card, pencils, scissors, tissue paper, PVA glue, glue spreaders.

Give each child a piece of card and ask them to draw the outline of a body in the centre of the card filling most of the card but ensuring to leave a frame of about 5 cm around it. Ask them to carefully cut out the body shape leaving the outside rim intact – so they should now have a body shape and an outline body shape within a frame. Ask them to put aside the solid body for the moment and place the outline body in front of them. Ask them to now use small pieces of different coloured tissue paper to fill in the body shape – overlapping and gluing as they do so. When dry these can be placed together in a group on a window to create a stained glass display of colourful bodies.

Talk with the children about the story and ask them to think about all their skills, gifts and talents and what makes each of us unique and different just like the bodies they have created. Discuss with them how these gifts differ and ask them to think about why we are not all given the same gifts and talents by God. Talk about what could happen when people of differing skills and talents come together as one group or body.

Let the children then decorate their ‘solid’ body shape to represent themselves and add to it their own gifts and talents, writing them on the body. Gather their people together as a group and if possible display on a wall.

Jointed Body

You will need: jointed body template (see page 113) printed onto A4 card, scissors, split pins (around ten per child depending on the numbers of joints on your template), hole punch (if required), felt tip pens, frieze paper.

Give each child their template and ask them to carefully cut out the different body parts. Show them how to connect each part to another using the split pins. If required punch a hole in each joint to ease the connection of one piece to another. Let the children complete their body.

Talk with the children about the story and ask them to think about all their skills, gifts and talents. Encourage them to think about how they use the different parts of their body for different skills (hands to play music or help at home, feet to play football or to run errands, arms to swim, heads to think, hearts to love, and so on).

Ask the children to now decorate their body as they please but also to write their skills, gifts and talents on the appropriate part of their body.

Talk about all their gifts and how when they come together as one body or group all of these gifts can be shared. Discuss how else they might share their gifts and with whom.

Lay out the frieze paper on a surface and ask the children to use one of their body’s split pins to push through the frieze paper and attach their body to the paper encouraging the children to form a group together.
discussion starters for teens
gifts and talents

Preparation
You will need two copies of the Diary grid found on page 114 for each young person and one copy of the Gifts and Talents sheet available on page 115 for each young person.

Opening Activity
The Best Gift
Ask each person to name the best gift they have ever been given. Let everyone describe what made it special to them.

The Word
Read Ephesians 4:1-16 together. The Message version of this reading is particularly helpful for making it understandable. It can be readily found on http://www.biblegateway.com.

Activity/Discussion
• What are the key roles in the church?
The church is a community of people. Some people come and join that community. Some people go out from that community. Our entire church is full of gifts that we all bring. Different people within the church can help us understand God, and how to live as a Christian in our communities. Our task is to work out what gifts and talents we have and how we can support and use those gifts to help the church.

Take a blank diary grid and in that grid put all the events that the church runs during a week.

Once you have all the events on paper ask the young people to work out what gifts and talents are needed at each event.

Take a second blank diary grid and in that grid put all the events that you know of taking place within the parish (or local area) that the church does not run. Mark down what gifts and talents could be used by the church to support some of these different events.

• Are some of these skills only useful within the church?
• Are some of these skills only useful outwith the church?
• Does the church allow enough people to use their gifts and talents?
• Where would you want to use your gifts and talents?

Living It Out
This week the challenge is to think about what our own gifts and talents are.

Give everyone a copy the Gifts and Talents sheet.

Get into pairs and ask the person the questions and note down their answer.

With the last question at the bottom of the sheet, everyone has to take it home with them. Encourage the young people to discuss it with someone in the church community. Someone who is a good example of being a part of the community and of following Jesus. Find out more about them and how they help the community grow and develop, and also how the community supports their talents.
Let The Good News Flow

A great many words and images have been shared over the last decade in reference to the growing militarisation of many police forces around the world. It was striking to watch a recent film, *Hidden Figures* — an uplifting story of the role of exceedingly talented African-American women working at NASA in the 1960s — and see the depiction of protests of civil rights marchers and police law enforcement. The images were familiar to any student of that period, but what seemed strange now was to see the police dressed in their uniforms, or sometimes even in shirt sleeves. Today, they would be dressed in full body armour, riot shields and helmets and batons to hand, with rifles and armoured vehicles in the background.

This closing word by Paul is a famous depiction of the spiritual struggle that following Christ may bring, one requiring the donning of armour ready for the task at hand. This is the language of militarisation, and it feels rather strange in describing the requirements of a follower of the Prince of Peace. However, this is not just Paul’s fevered imagination from the prison cell at work here, though we would surely give him the benefit of some license due to his circumstance. Paul is referencing the very depiction Isaiah gives (59:12-18) of the armour that the Lord will don in order to judge the world. This is apocalyptic language, thinking about the time of judgement, the final reckoning, and the preparations we should make as part of the Body of Christ, recognising that the powers that work against the principle of love and grace will not go down without seeking to do great damage.

It does not take much imagination, as people have done in all the centuries since, to look around our world at the powers and organisations that have greed and power as their existential requirements (here’s looking at you, transnational corporations) and the huge challenge of bringing justice in the face of such power. Perhaps even today, though the militaristic language is very loaded for some, the idea of putting on special protection is an encouragement to face up to these challenges for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

In a time when objective truth has become completely devalued, it is time to don the belt of truth. In a time when might is mistaken for right, God’s righteous armour is essential. In a time when aggression between nations and groups within communities is on the rise, it is high time to slip on the shoes of peace. When many struggle to see what the future holds for them, particularly a younger generation who see good job opportunities, the hope of owning their own home or the prospect of retirement as pie in the sky, the shield of faith is a necessity to see us through. In a time when there are many voices clamouring for our attention, our money, and our time, may our assurance in the grace of God provide a helmet to protect us heads from being deceived and the Word of God be a sword to pierce the pomposity and hollow promises that will never fulfil us.

Through all of this, Paul returns to the need for prayer as a means for the faithful to keep themselves rooted in the Way of Christ, and to be alert for whatever would lead away from that Way, and to do so with their fellow followers on the journey.

Paul’s letter begs the question: if we feel no need to don the armour of God, are we doing this faithful living right or are we missing something crucial to the Christian way of life?
A Soldier Of Christ

Andy: Hey Ada! Where can I buy a sword and shield and a helmet?
Ada: Are you going to a fancy dress party Andy?
Andy: Er, I don’t think so Ada! I want to be a soldier of Christ.
Ada: You want to be a soldier of Christ!
Andy: Aye, that’s right. What is so surprising about that?
Ada: Well Andy, I thought you were a gentleman, a man of peace and love, rather than a soldier!
Andy: That’s awful nice of you to say so Ada, but I am... strong... and, umm, macho like!
Ada: You? You mean the same man that is frightened of spiders and butterflies?
Andy: Shhh... Ada, don’t tell them stuff like that. I want to be a soldier for Christ, and Paul in the letter to Ephesians tells us that I need a sword and a shield and a helmet!
Ada: Andy. If you go out with a sword and a shield and helmet in Paisley, you will get arrested by the polis!
Andy: I will just tell them that I am going to church!
Ada: They will probably think you are going to the Old Firm match, and arrest you anyway!
Andy: But Ada, hen, it says in the Bible that is what I have to wear, and I like to get dressed up in the right gear.
Ada: Aye, Andy, I remember you with your flares, your pink shirt and your curly hair! You certainly got noticed when you had them on!
Andy: Oh, thanks very much Ada! (thinking it’s a compliment)
Ada: (looking at him strangely) Anyway, Andy. I don’t think that Paul writing to the Ephesians was suggesting a particular dress code for church!
Andy: Er, did he no mention in his Letter to Timothy that women were ‘to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God’?
Ada: Yes, Paul did mention that at one time, Andy, but he was dealing with a particular situation that is not relevant to our discussion here.
Andy: So, are you saying that Paul doesn’t want us to dress up like soldiers? I mean, I would look very smart don’t you think?
Ada: Listen Andy. Paul is not telling us to dress up in a costume to come to church in. He is encouraging us to live out the ways of God, using the gifts that God has given us?
Andy: So I cannae be a soldier of Christ?
Ada: Paul is speaking metaphorically here, Andy.
Andy: Ooh, I see! (clearly not seeing) So can I be a sailor for Christ or an air pilot for Christ?
Ada: NO, ANDY. A metaphor is ‘a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable’.
Andy: Umm, right.
Ada: Paul is using a soldier and his uniform to speak about the way he would like to see his fellow Christians live.
Andy: Oh, now I get it. I don’t need to wear a helmet, because he is saying that I already know Jesus Christ in my life.
Ada: Correct.
Andy: I don’t need a big sword, because that is the word of God in the Bible!
Ada: You’re getting there.
Andy: And I don’t need a shield because I have my faith in God, and I try my best to live it out each day.
Ada: Now you are on a roll, Andy. That’s exactly what Paul is talking about. God has already given you all the things you need to live life with him, and you don’t need a uniform to prove it, you just got to live the same way Jesus lived, and do the things Jesus taught us.
Andy: Ada, you are a genius. You make sense of things that help me to live as God calls us to live.
Ada: Thank you, Andy, I do my best.
Andy: ...Ada? Could I maybe just get a wee sword!
Ada: ANDY!
Andy: Only joking, hen, only joking!
Retelling For Young People

Military Mitchell

Mitchell Mouse is known to occasionally appear in church and have conversations with the Minister about God.

The Minister was sitting in the church saying his prayers. It was very quiet in the church. Only the quiet breathing of the minister could be heard.

The Minister had one eye opened and one eye closed, as though he was looking for God to turn up and surprise him.

However it was not God the Minister noticed, but Mitchell Mouse who caught his attention. Mitchell was not dressed up in his everyday mouse clothes. He was dressed up like a soldier and this took the Minister by surprise!

“Mitchell!” The Minister exclaimed. “Have you joined the Mouse Army?”

“No, Minister” replied Mitchell. “I have joined the army of the Lord!”

“Well, Minister, that’s what Paul said we need to put on to fight for God in this world.”

“Actually, Mitchell, Paul was not telling us to actually get dressed up in suits of armour, and to literally fight the dark forces like the organist’s cat. He was suggesting that we actually stand up for good and truth and justice, with the gifts that God has given us.”

“What do you mean, Minister?”

“Well, Mitchell, God wants us to always be honest and truthful in the things we do each day. To stand up for God and do the right thing, and to act as peacemakers and not troublemakers. He asks us to live faithfully to the teaching God has given us in the Bible, and to use the words it contains to stand up against the bad things in this world. God has promised to be our shield and protector.”

“Oh, Minister, I am so glad to hear that. This armour is so heavy and it makes you sweat something terrible!”

“Mitchell, God says that praying to him can really help us to stand up for the right things in this life. Would you like to join me in a prayer?”

“Thank you, Minister, that sounds like a great idea. Just let me get this armour off first.”

This is the prayer Mitchell and the Minister prayed:

Holy God, help us to stand up for your truth, help us to keep the faith of Jesus, and to share his love and peace with others. Teach us to be kind, and generous and loving, that the light of Christ might shine in the darkness, and defeat all the things that come against us. Amen.
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. The suggested image for this week is the same as in the previous weeks: a photograph or picture of your church building / gathering space.

Have business card sized cards for everyone as they come in. On each card have an image of an item from today’s reading (belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet) invite them to find other people with the same item an to sit with them for the service.

OR, if you began building a church in the previous weeks, let people add another brick this week.

Call to Worship

In these difficult times we come to be strengthened through prayer, word and action.

As we gather this day, may we open our eyes to the needs of this world, may we open our ears to the cries of our brothers and sisters, may we open our hearts to love one another through thick and thin. Let us worship the Lord God together.

All-Age Prayer

For all the fun of dressing up, for all the fun of imagining the armour God gives, help us, Lord, to take seriously that you know us and you protect us and that you never leave us alone. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Lord God, may we be prepared when you ask to take up or lay down our armour and offer our whole selves and all that we have to serve you in gladness. Amen.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God, we come into this place of sanctuary not to escape the world but to bring that world with us into your presence.

We come to share the week that has been and to look forward to all that you have in store for us.

And, Lord God, as you meet us here, you invite us to lay our burdens down: to lay down all that concerns us about our world; to lay down all that concerns us about our loved ones; to lay down all that concerns us about ourselves, for you carry us and all our burdens.

For all those times our fear overcame our faith, or concerns for our need overrode our concern for others, we ask your forgiveness.

For those times we failed to see or blatantly ignored an opportunity to share your light, we ask your forgiveness.

For those times we might have made a difference but were too tired or too slow or simply couldn’t be bothered, we ask your forgiveness.

Forgive us, Lord, and inspire us to step up for you in the future.

And, in your forgiveness, clothe us with all that we need to put the past behind and go and serve you however you call us today.

Convict us here in worship, not just with our failings but with the strength that is ours through you, God of power and might. Amen.

Reflective Prayer

Putting on the armour of God not to hide from the world but to enter the fray equipped to follow God into all the places we’d rather avoid.

Knowing when to don the protection God provides and knowing when to lay ourselves open and vulnerable, God give us the wisdom and the grace to be equipped for every spiritual battle and the strength to follow wherever you lead. Amen.
worship ideas

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

When we imagine, O God, that we have no need of your armour today, confront us with all that ails our world.

Confront us with the powers of darkness that continue to stalk this earth, withholding justice, withholding grace, withholding love.

Confront us and remind us that today, we are called to put on the armour of truth to counter the lies that oppress your people, preventing them from attaining the marvellous potential you planted in them.

Confront us and remind us that today, we are called to put on the armour of righteousness, so that our faith is not tarnished but shines through the darkness and points to you as the giver and sustainer of life.

Confront us and remind us that today, we are called to put on the armour of peace, that whispers a message of hope into every place of conflict and reveals you, the Prince of peace, kneeling to cradle the battle scarred.

Confront us and remind us that today, we are called to put on the armour of faith that, against the odds, holds out for your perfect kingdom—not just at the end but in the here and now.

God keep on confronting us to take up the fight in our prayer and in our action to see you victorious in all the world. Amen.

Reflection

Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, Spirit: God’s fashion accessories for the modern Christian. Will we wear them up or down? Wear them at a jaunty angle? Go for the baggy, unkempt look or the spruced up, polished look.

Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, Spirit: God’s fashion accessories for the modern Christian. Will we wear them by day or only don them for the night? Will they see us from casual daytime wear into elegant evening dress?

Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, Spirit: God’s fashion accessories for the modern Christian. Will we be the right fit? The right shape? The right folk to carry them off? God calls us to put on the whole armour—each bit with spit and polish, each bit bathed in prayer. And God dresses us up and equips us for the task that lies before us. The task of standing firm in serving the God of love and might and power. Thanks be to God.

Take Home Ideas

You may have been given a card with an item of clothing or protection as you came in today. Clothes play an important role: they cover us, protect us, keep us warm, keep us dry...

What about God’s armour? What is it that protects you and makes you feel safe? This week, reflect on what we need and what we can do to keep God’s protection close by. Thank God for the things which keep us safe.

Sending

Send us out, O God, clothed and protected by you with holy armour and strength.

Praise/Hymns

Anytime, anywhere ATAS 18
A safe stronghold our God is still CH4 454 / MP 2
Be thou my Vision CH4 465 / MP 51
Darkness like a shroud MP 110
Fight the good fight MP 143
For all the saints CH4 740 / MP 148
God of grace and God of glory MP 192
I am a wounded soldier MP 255
I bind unto myself today CH4 639
In heavenly armour we’ll enter the land MP 639
Like the murmur of the dove’s song CH4 592
March on, my soul, with strength CH4 236
O Lord, the clouds are gathering CH4 708 / MP 509
Onward! Christian soldiers CH4 514 / MP 543
Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire CH4 546 / MP 567
Soldiers of Christ, arise CH4 515 / MP 604
True-hearted, whole-hearted MP 711
We shall stand MP 737
What a friend we have in Jesus CH4 547 / MP 746
Who would true valour see CH4 535
age group ideas gathering

Join The Body all age

Play a game similar to ‘North, South, East and West’ where one wall in your space is designated shield, one helmet, one belt, one sword and when you shout ‘God’s Armour’ the children have to stand as still as they can with their hands together as if in prayer.

Play the game by calling out ‘Shield’, ‘Sword’, ‘Belt’, ‘Helmet’ or ‘God’s Armour’ with the last person to reach the wall or to stand still in prayer each time eliminated from the game.

Use this game as a way into the story of God’s armour.

games

A Shoe Fit For The Job all age

You will need: a selection of boots and shoes in adult sizes that would be associated with particular professions (e.g. Croc sandals for nurses, Wellington boots for fishermen/farmers, stilettos for models, hiking boots for mountaineers, running shoes for athlete, polished black shoes for businessman, leather sandals for Jesus, and so on.

The passage talks about putting on shoes which will make you proclaim the gospel of peace. For this game put all the shoes and boots in a big heap in the middle of the floor and split the children into small teams. As you shout out the name of an occupation that would wear the shoes the first child in each team runs to the pile to find the shoes/boots that that person would wear and takes them back to the team. If they get one shoe they get 5 points if they get both shoes they get 2 x 5 points plus 2 bonus points for getting both.

Quick Feet all age

You will need: a large number of shoes/boots for each team (you will need to enlist the congregation’s help in gathering a large pile of shoes).

Place the shoes in large piles corresponding to the number of teams you have. In relay fashion, each child has to run up to their pile of shoes and find the matching pair and put them on to run back to their team, releasing the next person to do the same.

You could then do it again, but this time a bit like the game above, give the children a particular style of shoe to look for in their respective piles (ensuring that there are that style available in each pile of shoes to be fair).

activities

Protective Clothing age 3-5

You will need: images articles of clothing relating to people who wear forms of armour/uniform, actual items if available (for instance, steel toe-capped boots, high visibility vest, hard hat, and so on).

Show the children images from the occupations in the word game for the older children about people who wear armour or show the items of clothing you have gathered. Talk about the job, what is involved, what they are wearing and link it to the children themselves wearing a helmet when on a bike or a seat belt in the car. Lead on to talking about God’s armour of love, kindness and so on.

Ambassadors age 6-12

You will need: do a little research on ambassadors from your country to other countries, or ambassadors within your country, having a list of some them available.

Talk about the role of ambassadors in diplomacy between nations and what they do in foreign countries and how they can help. For example, Ian Lindsay, the UK’s ambassador to Hungary has been very supportive of the Church of Scotland. Charities of organisations like the UNICEF have ambassadors to publicise their work and the issues they deal with. Lead on to the idea of how we might be God’s ambassadors today in our world.

Anagram Armour age 6-12

You will need: copies of the activity sheet (see page 116), pens.

Let the children try to work out all the different jobs in the anagrams, some help is provided with the images. The correct answers are, from top to bottom: surgeons, police, soldiers, American football players, ministers, boxer, road worker, miner, astronaut, deep sea diver. Once this is complete talk about the very different kinds of armour that Christians can use: love, peace, harmony, unity, kindness, forgiveness, and prayer.

Strong Feelings all age

You will need: copies of the emoticons available on page 111.

Paul was writing this letter from prison but you would not think it from the tone of the letter. Give the children some examples of situations where their emotions would be different. The children then pick the emoticon that describes how they would feel.

Examples could be: singing, teacher telling them off, receiving a gift, fighting, late for school, eating chocolate.

Sometimes it is very hard to stay positive and always put on God’s armour of being loving, forgiving and kind.
Shields Of Faith  age 3-5

You will need: a card shield shape for each child which has been divided into four parts by drawing a line from the top to the bottom and from side to side, felt tip pens, coloured pencils.

Talk to the children about armour, what it looks like and what it does. Talk about this week's Story Retelling and how Mitchell put on the wrong kind of armour and discuss what God's armour turned out to be in the story. Ask them to give you some examples of times when they have been loving, kind, honest or truthful and of times when they have shared and tried to make peace with others.

Give each child a shield shape and ask them to draw one of their examples into each section of their shield to help them remember to always wear God's armour and try to do what is right.

Belts Of Truth  age 6-8

You will need: strips of cloth approximately 60 cm long and four cm wide (length will depend on the waist measurement of the children, with three per child), fabric pens, scissors.

Give each child three strips of cloth and ask them to write the word ‘TRUTH’ along each strip. Ask them to tie the three strips together at one end with a knot about five cm from the end of the strip and then to plait the three strips together by weaving over and under to make a belt. Fasten off the other end five cm from the end with a knot. The ends can then be cut in short strips as a tassel at the end of the belt. The belt of truth can then be worn.

Shoes Of Peace  age 9-12

You will need: funky foam, hole punch, strong wool, string or ribbon, felt tip pens, large scissors.

Give each child a piece of the funky foam and ask them to draw around each of their feet in turn, while they are still wearing their shoes to create a smooth outline. They should then cut out these outlining creating the soles of a pair of sandals. Now ask them to remove their shoes and place first their right foot on the right sole they have cut out. They should mark a point somewhere between their 'big toe' and the next toe and a point at each end just below the widest part of their foot to allow ‘flip flops’ to be created. Repeat for the left foot. Help them to punch a hole at each point they have marked.

To make the toe support, give each child a short piece of ribbon (length will depend on the size of the child's feet) and folding it in half pass the loop through the toe hole and then tie the ribbon off underneath with a knot to create a loop on the upper side. Give them a longer piece of ribbon and pass it through the loop and then pass each side through the holes at each edge and knot tightly underneath to create the sandal. Ask the children to then turn over their sandals and using the felt pens to write in block writing the word ‘PEACE’.

Discuss with the children the way shoes or boots can protect our feet in different situations, such as when it is wet, when climbing a hill, when working in the garden. Talk about the story and discuss with the children how armour protects. Encourage them to think of what they would put on if they were to put on God's armour. Talk about being truthful, honest, loving, kind and being a peacemaker. Encourage them to think about how they could protect themselves and others by wearing God's armour.

God's Armour  all age

You will need: a large outline of a person wearing armour (ensuring they are wearing a helmet, a sword, a belt and a shield, breastplate too if possible!), large felt pens.

Talk to the children about the person wearing armour and talk about why they wear it and what they wear. Talk about the Story Retelling and how Mitchell put on the wrong kind of armour and see if the children can identify from the story some of the words which identify God's armour. Examples might be: stand up for God, stand up for good, truth, justice, doing the right thing, being loving, being kind, being a peacemaker. Discuss how this armour could protect them.

Now ask the children to write these words on the armour on the outline figure and/or draw people showing that they are wearing God's armour, for example by sharing, being honest, praying, standing up for God.
Preparation

For this week you will need paper and colouring pens or pencils for the Opening Activity.

For this week in advance research who is very good at wrapping presents in the church community and ask them to come and help you do some wrapping with the young people. You will need to discuss with the selected person what wrapping material is appropriate.

You may wish to print out the reading to help with the Living It Out activity if the group does not normally bring bibles with them.

Opening Activity

Camouflage Yourself

Camouflage is worn mainly by soldiers to help them blend in with their surroundings. Your task is to take one piece of paper, and design some new types of camouflage for some new 21st century situations.

Examples might be:

• the school,
• for an office,
• for the church,
• for the street,

and whatever other situations you can imagine.

The Word

Read Ephesians 6:10-20 together. The Message version of this reading is particularly helpful for making it understandable. It can be readily found on http://www.biblegateway.com.

Activity/Discussion

Wrapping Presents

Invite someone from the congregation to come and help the young people learn how to wrap up a present very carefully. The activity of wrapping a present or similar is quite tricky and time consuming to do well.

While wrapping the present ask the young people to silently consider:

• Where have you had some beautiful wrapping?
• Does the addition of beautiful wrapping tell you anything about the person who has wrapped the present or the present itself?
• How does wrapping a present to give compare to the reading today?
• Is it easy to think about protecting yourself like Paul asks us in the reading?

Living It Out

The military aspects of the reading sometimes leads us to think this reading only applies for conflict situations. Most lives are not that warring space.

Split the groups into small groups of twos or threes, look again at the reading and in your pairs try and work out what an equivalent of Paul’s armour would be, for you today. Perhaps the trainers (sneakers) of the gospel of peace, or the football jersey of righteousness.

As you do this consider:

• How do you prepare for each day with your clothing and how you prepare for each day with God?
Belonging To God

The sense of belonging is crucial within human life. Many people find their strength and their confidence to function emanating out of that experience of knowing they belong. Conversely many other people struggle hugely in life because they do not share that sense of belonging, or are somehow barred from inclusion within a specific community.

Often this sense of ‘not-belonging’ is ostensibly an emotional reality stemming from the way others make us feel or the way we make ourselves feel. That can be the result of the perception we have of ourselves or what we think people feel about us. Yet, there is also a very strong physical experience within the sense of belonging for often people are indeed physically barred from opportunities that are afforded to others.

In our world today many dividing lines exist which seem to separate one group of people from another. One such dividing line, in a broad sense, is ‘those who belong’ versus ‘those who do not belong’. Psychologists tell us that being, or feeling, excluded undermines self-control and well-being and often creates pain and conflict. A sense of belonging however improves motivation, health, and happiness and the ability to achieve.

As we read the Acts passage today, on the face of it the passage can read as being about Christian baptism. Maybe this was its purpose. But reflecting more deeply on the underlying themes, the historical context, and indeed the understanding we have of what baptism means for the baptised today, this reading encourages us to consider what it means to ‘belong’.

Immediately before this passage Peter is holding nothing back as he accuses the crowd of being responsible for the death of Christ. The crowd would naturally have been angered by this but perhaps it also left them with the feeling that Pater was insinuating because of this they didn’t ‘belong’; that, somehow, they were excluded from God’s love because of what they had done to his son. A well-known trick in public speaking, of course, is to knock people down before picking them back up and concluding with a more positive emphasis. This is exactly what Peter appears to do. He makes folks feel terrible, and then offers them hope—giving them something they can do to make things right.

One understanding of this passage may lead us to say baptism is the doorway into the community of ‘belonging’ within the church, that for Peter and the crowds who heard this message, followed on from a period of seeking repentance and the resultant stepping forward into new journey. The emphasis underlying the Gospel in many traditions however is more to do with baptism as a symbol that expresses this reality of ‘belonging’ to God.

In the context of this passage today, many will choose to consider that what is being shared is a re-emphasising of a Gospel perspective that speaks of the whole of humanity ‘belonging’ to God and being the beneficiaries of his loving acts. Baptism then is a sign of this inclusiveness of God and the recognition of one’s ‘belonging’. Baptism is a gift for us all. It is about ‘belonging’ together. It is a gift freely given, not so much about believing but instead confirming and affirming us as ‘belonging’ to God.

Within the Church, baptism can be an antidote to the current crisis amongst many of lacking a sense of ‘belonging’. It does not mean those not baptised, not part of the church, are not belonging, but instead it is an encouragement to those who are part of church communities to recognise the need to work in our world to make sure that in whatever context, people always feel that they belong. In such belonging comes a stillness of being.
the story

**Turn Around**

Voice A: Turn around,
Voice B: be baptised
Voice C: and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Voice A: A gift,
Voice B: a promise,
Voice C: a welcome,
Voice A: for you,
Voice B: for your children,
Voice C: for those who are far away.

Voice A: The people who heard Peter’s message
Voice B: became part of what we call the early church.
Voice C: They, with others, became a family,
Voice A: a family of adults and children,
Voice B: a family of elders and babies,
Voice C: a family of different nationalities.

Voice A: They shared bread.
Voice B: They shared tears and laughter.
Voice C: They shared resources and prayers.

Voice A: Today
Voice B: in this place
Voice C: we are God’s family.

Voice A: God’s Spirit is amongst us
Voice B: in baptism,
Voice C: in love and sharing,
Voice B: in our daily lives.

Voice A: A gift.
Voice B: A promise.
Voice C: A welcome.

Voice A: For us.
Voice B: For our children.
Voice C: For those who are far away.

**Psalm 46**

*An all-age version using selected verses.*

All: God is our shelter, our safe home.
     God helps us when we are in trouble.

Side A: When things around us change
       we need not be afraid.

Side B: God is where we live,
       in our village, our city, our town.

Side A: God is stronger than fighting and wars.
       God is stronger than winds and storms.

Side B: Be still and know God’s peace inside you.
       Be still and know God’s love.

All: God is always with us.
     God is our shelter and our safe home.

**Retelling For Young People**

**An Exciting Day**

Ailsa was excited. Today she was going to church with her mum and dad. She often went to church and today her baby brother was coming too. Today her baby brother was going to be baptised. Ailsa had seen baptisms before. She knew that the minister would say some prayers and that she would take her baby brother in her arms, say his name and pour some water on his head.

Ailsa had helped choose her baby brother’s name. He was called Andrew James MacLeod. Andrew had been his great grandfather’s name, James was a name that Ailsa and her mum and dad liked and MacLeod was their family name. It was a long name for a little boy, but already at home it had been shortened to Andy.

Ailsa wondered if Andy would cry when the minister poured water on his head. She hoped the water would be warm. She did not want Andy to get cold.

Ailsa had talked with her mum and dad about baptism. She remembered that Jesus had been baptised. They told her that baptism was a way of saying to Andrew “God loves you”. It was a way of welcoming Andrew into the church family. Her mum and dad told her that they would make promises in church. They would promise to look after Andrew and to tell him the stories of Jesus as he grew up. Ailsa thought that she could help with that too. She already helped to look after Andrew. She helped mix his food, she often gave him a cuddle and she knew lots of stories about Jesus too.

The people in the church would make a promise too. They would promise to be kind to Andrew and to welcome him into the church family.

It was nearly time to go. Andrew looked very smart he had new white clothes on. Ailsa hoped that he would not dribble on them, but her mum had thought of that and had a towel and some wet-wipes in her bag.

The church was near to their house and it was a sunny morning so Ailsa and her mum and dad, and Andrew in his push chair set off down the road.
Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season.

This week’s image could be of water or place the font centrally if it is possible to move it and drape fabric or crepe paper in watery blues flowing out of it, or create a flower arrangement to represent this idea.

Invite people to simply sit quietly and ‘be still’ as they wait for the start of the service. You may need to remember to let your musicians know.

Call to Worship

In God we find our safety net, present with us in all times, the bad and the good, the down days and the up days. To him we come ready to be still at his font of grace.

Come gather round, let your bodies rest, your minds focus on the God who promises refreshment and renewal. Come be still.

Responses

Leader: Be still,
All: God is our refuge and strength.

Leader: Be still,
All: a very present help in every trouble.

Leader: Be still,
All: we will not fear.

Leader: Be still,
All: God is in our midst.

Leader: Be still,
All: the Lord of hosts is with us.

Leader: Be still,
All: behold his works.

Leader: Be still,
All: wars will cease.

Leader: Be still, be still and know that he is God.

Prayer of Dedication

Generous God, as we have stilled our hearts, knowing that we belong to you, may we now rouse ourselves to service. We are yours and we commit ourselves to your service, through our time, our abilities, our resources. Amen.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Merciful God, your identity is one of community—
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Humanity’s identity, as your created people, is also one of community—brothers and sisters together across the world.

We know that your heart must ache when you see the harm we cause through policies and ways of life, that exclude, isolate and segregate.

We need to recognise this is wrong. We need to see that this is not the way things should be.

Come, life-changing God; break into our lives and renew us. We know that we cannot absolve ourselves of some of the broken-ness we see in the world.

Sometimes our actions, or lack of action, impacts on people more than we think. Many of our fellow brothers and sisters are crying Lord; many are hurting, many are lost, many have few options.

We need to recognise this is wrong. We need to see that this is not the way things should be.

Come, life-changing God; break into our lives and renew us by your mercy listen to our prayers this day—
the prayers we now make in the silence of our own hearts.

Silence

Come, life-changing God; break into our lives and renew us by your healing love re-make us. Amen.

Reflective Prayer

Lord, who is there for me? Who is there to take my hand? Who is there to listen? Who is willing to fight my corner? Who is there to make my side? Who is there to welcome me?

Who is there to look at me with eyes that express love? Who is there to make me feel I belong? To feel I do not belong is ripping my heart to pieces. I cannot express it in any less emotional way.

I wish to belong. I wish to know to whom I belong! Are you listening God?

Yes, child of my heart, I am! Yes, child of my being, I hear you. Know indeed you are loved. Though the world might be slow to catch on, Know that I am working my purposes out.

One day you will be made to feel you belong as the attitudes of others melts, as the actions of your brothers and sisters brings a genuine kindness to bear in your life. For now, sweet child of mine, know indeed you belong, for you belong to me.
**Prayers for Others and Ourselves**

Lord what must it feel like
to have a sense that you do not belong?
Most of us praying today, thankfully,
do not feel like that
or have not felt like that very often across our lifetimes.

But many across our world have always felt like that.
Some currently are feeling so alone
and isolated in their life at present
that they are overcome with a sense of ‘not belonging’.

Today we pray for those who are faced with
having to leave their homes
and travel as immigrants to a new life.

Often that journey is perilous.
And if they do make it to a new country,
too often they find that
the life dreamt about is not what they find.
Still they are made to feel they do not belong.
We pray for families in this situation,
asking that the feeling of belonging
is made real for them.

We also pray for those nations, communities and peoples,
who have the responsibility to make everyone feel they belong:
those who have been living in a given society for a while,
but who none-the-less feel isolated;
those who have arrived to begin a new life;
and those whose circumstances
call for a hand of friendship to be extended.

We pray today for different people
and different generations in our community,
that all may feel appreciated and cared for.

We think of older people, the young, the single,
the divorced, widower and widow.

May your rich blessing be on all people,
especially those who live with feelings of vulnerability
and challenge.

We pray in the name of Jesus, your Son.
Amen.

**Reflection**

*This requires the reader to take their time and speak the words in rhythm with their breathing.*

Be still, and know that I am God.
What does it mean to be still?

Take a moment, concentrate on your breathing,
in, out, in, out...
Slowly filling our lungs with life,
expelling the CO2,
breathing in the good, breathing out the bad,
in, out, in out...
Be still, concentrate,
in, out, in out...
Be still, be still...

*A short time of silence*

Be still and know that I am God.

**Take Home Ideas**

this week you may have been asked to be still and reflect
on your baptism, you may know exactly when your baptism
occurred, if you don’t find out. There may be a certificate, or if
you are older it may have been written on your birth certificate.
Were you presented with a bible? Did you have God Parents?

If you were not baptised as a baby, was there a service of
blessing or dedication instead?

Thank God for the blessing that baptism brings.

**Sending**

Send us out, O God,
into the stillness and rest,
into the waters of baptism
and blessing.

**Praise/Hymns**

A little child, the saviour came CH4 631
All you works of God CH4 151
Be still and know CH4 754 / MP 48
Be still, for the presence of the Lord CH4 189 / MP 50
Child of blessing, child of promise CH4 633
Christ is our light, the bright and morning star CH4 336
God is our refuge and strength CH4 36
God is our refuge, God our strength CH4 37
God is our strength and refuge MP 188
Here in this place, new light is streaming CH4 623
I am the church CH4 204
Now dawns the sun of righteousness MP 484
Oh, the life of the world CH4 141
Out of the flowing river CH4 335
Says Jesus, “Come and gather round” CH4 342
The church is wherever God’s people are praising CH4 522
There’s a Spirit in the air CH4 616
Word of the father, the life of creation CH4 634
age group ideas

gathering

**Turn Around**

Gather children together in a circle facing inwards and ask them to describe what they see. Get the children to turn around to face outwards and ask them to describe what they see. You could try this outside if you have space and it is not raining.

Use this as a way into the story and the call to turn to be forgiven and baptized.

**Crafts**

**Plastic Bowl Font**

*age 3-8*

You will need: plastic bowls, sticky gems, stickers, sticky dots, blue tissue paper ripped into small pieces, PVA glue, glue spreaders.

Give each child a plastic bowl and ask them to decorate it with gems and stickers on the outside and blue tissue paper on inside to represent a font with water in it.

Talk with the children about baptism being a gift from God which shows God’s love.

Discuss with the children ways in which we can show God’s love and welcome those who are being baptised, whatever their age.

**String And Foil Font Picture**

*age 9-12*

You will need: string, PVA glue, glue spreaders, thick A4 card, pencils, tin foil cut into pieces A4 size.

Give each child a sheet of card and a pencil. Ask the children to draw a simple line drawing of font onto the card. If you have a font in your worship space which can be moved, you could bring it into room where children are meeting or you could provide pictures as ideas/inspiration for the children. Ask the children to glue pieces of string onto the outline that have drawn. Next ask the children to place tin foil over picture, pressing down so that the string comes into relief and the outline of their font can be seen through the foil. Glue the edges of the foil down.

Talk with the children about baptism being a gift from God which shows God’s love. Talk with the children about gifts we could give those who are baptised in our church to welcome them and show they belong: not just gifts like flowers, bible, certificate but also gifts of friendship, smiles, invitations to tea/coffee after the service.

**Walking Together**

*all age*

You will need: new white ankle socks (one per child), marker pens, glitter, PVA glue, glue spreaders, frieze or lining paper.

Give each child a sock (try to keep the sock flat) and ask them to decorate one side of the sock with pens and glitter (other collage material could be added). Then stick the sock onto the frieze paper to make feet walking along a path.

Talk about journeys the children make on foot and who they walk with. Talk about how we all walk together as God’s children and we learn from each other, help each other, encourage each other as did the apostles and those who were being baptized. Baptism was not the end of the journey, it was part of it.

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**Sunday 13 August 2017**
activities

Still And Silent  all age

Arrange the children sitting in a circle facing each other. It would be good if one of the helpers could stay off to one side and watch the children from a distance. Talk to the children about the importance of trying to stay still and quiet. Say that they are to try and sit still and quiet for one minute. The observer will watch and write down the children's names in the order that they fail this task. After playing a game come back to being still and try it for two minutes while the observer watches again. Talk to the children about how difficult it is to sit and do nothing except listen for God and because people find it so difficult they do not do it very often but it takes practice.

Safe Places  all age

You will need: images of safe secure places like castles, sand, buckets, building blocks (such as Lego), for older children copies of the activity sheet found on page 117, pencils.

This can be used for all ages, in much more detail for the older children.

• Why are buildings like castles safe and secure places?
• What would they protect us from? (Talk about height, position, thickness of walls and so on.)
• Can the children name any castles they have visited?
• Can they name any castles they have seen in films?

For younger children if you have the facilities you could build a sand castle. For all ages build a castle from Lego or shoe boxes. For the older children you can use the activity sheet with the quiz about different castles. The correct answers are clockwise from top left: Eilean Donan, Mey, Stirling, Balmoral, Glamis, Edinburgh.

God is strong and secure just like a castle and he gives us refuge. You can imagine together some scary scenarios, or perhaps tell a story about some disaster happening, but ending with the assurance that God gives us strength to face challenges, though being honest that they can still be difficult.

games

We Shall Not Be Moved  age 6-12

God is everywhere and will never leave us. The children are to sit in a circle with legs stretched out in front of them with arms linked together and tightly packed together. One person remains outside the circle and tries to pull someone out of the circle. They have three attempts before they join the circle and someone else has a turn.

Know God Quiz  all age

You will need: copies of the quiz sheet available on page 118.

Be still, and KNOW that I am God. What do the children actually know about God? Start with some easy questions and lead onto to more difficult ones or use some of the questions in the appendix.

The answers to the questions on the quiz sheet are:

1. Heavens and the Earth
2. Rainbow
3. Ten
4. Yahweh
5. Love
6. Jesus
7. Holy Spirit
8. Trinity
9. Everywhere
10. Prayer (there may be other good imaginative ways)
11. Sins
12. Children

Keep It Still  all age

Be still and know that I am God. There are many games that involve being very still such as traffic lights, musical statues and such like. Play these games and make the stillness last longer each time. You can comment on how difficult is it for the children to stay still.
discussion starters for teens
unlocking a new way

Preparation
For today's session you will require internet access to play videos from YouTube. Alternatively the videos can be saved by visiting www.keepvid.com.

The Houdini Lock Puzzles are available for purchase at http://www.amazon.co.uk (for example see http://amzn.eu/84Shhf5).

Opening Activity
Lock Picking
Using the Houdini Lock Puzzles challenge the group to find a way of opening the locks. The activity provides the opportunity to practice working together and encourages participants to think outside the box.

As an alternative activity you could use the following YouTube videos as an observation test. It is easy to miss what we are not looking for.

Moonwalking Bear Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4&t=8s
Whodunnit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBF9QNEQLA&t=2s

The Word

Activity/Discussion
Today's reading picks up Peter's address to the gathered crowd. His experience along with the disciples in the locked room has empowered Peter to go public. On being filled with the Holy Spirit fear has been replaced with confidence. We know from the beginning of the chapter that the crowd included pilgrims from every nation under the sun.

- Who do you think would have been in the crowd?
- What do you think convinced people of Peter's argument?
- What was Peter challenging the crowd to see in a new way?
- Where do you think Peter's new found confidence came from?

Living It Out
Take time to look at the well known story of the concert violinist Joshua Bell busking in a Washington Metro station. This can be found at http://www.childrenandyouth.co.uk/youth/the-story-of-joshua-bell/

- Why do you think very few people stopped?
- Why do you think children were more likely to stop compared to adults?

Have a discussion about the things we might walk past every day and might not recognise.

- How might life be different if we slowed down?

Encourage the members of the group to capture some photographs during the week of things they see in a new way or had not noticed before.
baptism 2: renewal

Possibility Of Renewal

Welcome back! The Scottish Church very much revolves around the rhythms of the school holiday calendar. Realistically it is not until school children return to school that churches regain a momentum for the season that includes Sunday attendance, the start-up of church organisations, and often the business of the church as focus groups and committees get on with their work. And so, this Sunday, as life in the Scottish Church resumes after the school holidays, it seems appropriate to consider themes of renewal and new start.

The holiday season allows us to refuel, rebalance and reinvigorate ourselves. We hear a lot about ‘renewal’ both in personal life and corporate life. It is true, the reality is that ‘renewal’ is a constant process. It is not confined to a once-in-a-lifetime situation and seldom happens for any organisation or individual as an isolated experience. In nature, the Seasons of the year and the rhythms of the plant and animal world reveal this most clearly. Renewal is an ongoing activity within creation. It is also part and parcel of the human world, and as such we see it as a regular theme throughout scripture. Perhaps most clearly of all we see it in those passages that speak of the renewal of life through the actions of water and submersion.

For an individual, baptism is a sign of ‘dying to an old way of life’ and the renewing that comes from the ‘new life offered in Christ’. Theologically this holds true for both the infant and his/her family in ‘infant baptism’, and the older child and adult in a ‘believer’s baptism’. We might also add that the corporate vow made as a congregation during baptism, is also a renewal of the corporate life and faith of the Christian community, and the faith and life of all present. Baptism is a renewal of individual life, and our belonging together.

This passage introduces the whole gamut of some of the biggest themes of Christian living and our right relationship with God. In these verses, we have the themes of: grace, faith, love, sin, confession, repentance, resurrection, salvation, eternal life, all mixed in together with the concept of baptism. It is almost true to say we could take our pick: focusing on any one of these themes and putting together many different reflections on this passage.

Or we could take these themes together as a whole. Rather than trying to limit our relationship with God to any one or two of these things, we might instead see the reality of the need for the whole picture, thanking God for his marvellous love and grace. This is what makes a right relationship with God possible through the knowledge, planning and activities of a God who recognises our human limitations and who provides opportunities for healing, reversal and renewal in every moment of life.

In the context of this wonderful possibility of renewal, we remember in this season that for many in church this Sunday, this is a time of year that will see a return to school. In addition, this time of year will also include the resumption of many church activities and a heightened intensity in church focus and administration. It therefore seems very appropriate to take time to dedicate much of this activity to the purposes of God.

Perhaps within our worship we should be looking for opportunities to provide God’s blessing for the school bags packed and ready for use, the children entering new challenges within their new school year, the organisations of the church embarking on a new session, and of course in general terms the functioning of the church as it fulfils its responsibilities to be the source of God’s love in the day to day life of our world.
What Does It Mean To Be Baptised?

Voice A: What does it mean to be baptised?

Voice B: Peter on the day of Pentecost talked about a gift and a promise and a welcome.

Voice A: Paul in the letter to the Romans talked about death and resurrection and living a new kind of life.

Voice B: Baptism is a sign, a symbol, something that the church sometimes calls a sacrament.

Voice A: Baptism is God saying I love you.

Voice B: Baptism is the Church saying we welcome you.

Voice A: Baptism is about belonging.

Voice B: Baptism is the beginning of a new journey.

Voice A: Baptism involves water and getting wet.

Retelling For Young People

A Night Baptism

Michael and Peter were in the same class in school. They were working hard because they had exams coming soon. They often spent time together, they like a lot of the same things: scary films, marshmallows floating in hot chocolate and taking Michael’s dog for long walks in the woods.

They both went to church as well and often talked to each other about what they thought the stories in the bible were about and what they thought God was like.

This Sunday night Michael was going to go to Peter’s church. Usually they went to different churches but Peter had told Michael that he was going to be baptised tonight and that he wanted Michael to come.

Michael had been surprised when Peter had told him. In his church it was usually babies who were baptised not teenagers. Peter told him that in his church babies were blessed, but not baptised; baptism was something you did to tell people that you had decided to be a Christian and to follow Jesus.

Michael had talked to his mum about it. She had told him that he had been baptised when he was a baby because baptism was about being welcomed into God’s family and their church’s way of saying to a baby God loves you, even though the baby was too young to know what was happening. Different churches did things different ways but baptism was always about recognising that God loves you.

Peter had told Michael a bit about the way his church baptised people. They did not sprinkle a bit of water on them, they dipped them into a big bath of water called a baptistery. Peter told Michael about a verse in the bible that said that baptism was like being buried and then lifted up into new life. Being dipped under the water and lifted out again was like a picture of death and resurrection.

Michael and Peter had talked about when Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan. He might have had water poured over him by John or John might have lowered him under the water. Nobody really knew, and they decided that the important thing was that Jesus had been baptised and that he heard God tell him that he loved him and was pleased with him.

Michael and Peter were both looking forward to Sunday night. Peter was ready to be baptised and Michael was looking forward to seeing his friend get very wet.
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. Use an image of water or have your font centre stage again with a jug of water sitting in it.

During the Call to Worship have someone pour the water into the font dramatically, allowing the water to splash and even spill over the edge (depending on your floor coverings).

Invite people again to sit quietly before the service begins.

Call to Worship

God’s home is here, in this place with these people.

We come to seek renewal, new life, new hope.

In water God makes us new turning us away from our sins, setting us on a new and right path.

Come gather round the font of grace and love.

Allow yourself to be refreshed, renewed, set straight.

Come and be loved.

Responses

Leader: How lovely is God’s house.

All: Our hearts sings to be in his presence.

Leader: Even the sparrow finds a home and a place to nest.

All: How blessed we are to be in his presence.

Leader: Happy are those whose strength is in God.

All: How happy we are.

Leader: Lord, open your ears to our prayers.

All: We lift them to you.

Leader: Our time with you is precious, O Lord.

All: We delight to share these moments together.

Leader: Lord you are our shield against life, happy are we who trust in you.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Creating God,
we thank you for a world that is constantly renewing.
The seasons come and go; the patterns of life change, the opportunities for new experiences are frequent and many.
You are always busy in the activity of recreating our world and our lives.

In our human existence, there is much that changes and much that needs to change. Individually we know our own weakness, failings and faults. We know that intuitively you know where and when and how we sin.

Yet, in your goodness and mercy you make it possible for us to put to death the aspects of our lives that are not in keeping with your will.

Rather than admonish us with no hope for improvement, or of change, instead you make it possible for us to rebalance and renew.

Today we thank you for the continuing new opportunities that you make available for fresh starts, and for the new life possible for us to establish and enjoy.

Merciful God, wash over us with life-changing spirit. Bathe us in waters of new life and restore us to a better version of ourselves, that we may live more purposefully as the people you intend us to be.

Amen.

All-Age Prayer

God of everything:
of all people;
of the world we live in;
of holiday time and school term.

We come before you today dedicating ourselves to the tasks of being your Church in the world.

Today we ask for your blessing on us as we return to school after holiday.

May school be fun, something we look forward to, and a place of good learning.

We ask your blessing too on parents and other family members who support the younger generations through school life.

Today we also ask you, God, to bless all the activities of our churches that all that takes place will further your work and goodness in our communities and world.

Amen.
Prayer for Others and Ourselves

Loving God,
we pray for our world and its people.

This world is not yet as clean as it should be. The dirt and grime of pollution looms large over the natural habitats of our planet. The seas are awash with the items disposed recklessly. The air is thick with emissions that cause harm below and above. The land suffers the result of chemical imbalance caused by pesticides, chemical spills, and short term farming that fails to project beyond the present.

A rebalancing is needed. A renewing of this wonderful creation is required.

Today we pray that your Spirit will direct us towards a better stewardship of this world. Help the leaders and decision makers think globally and with long term goals in mind, to think about how to preserve this world and its resources for the generations to come.

Loving God,
we pray for our world and its people.

Humanity is not as it should be. Inequality, segregation, racial tension, exploitation, poverty and hunger, injustice greed, poverty and war wreak havoc across the continents of our world. The poorest people are the ones whose lives are affected most by the inappropriate actions of the powerful. Some are given ample opportunities to discover fulfilment and blessing; others, through no fault of their own, are not given the same chances.

A rebalancing is needed. A renewing of the circumstances across the human family is required.

Today we pray that there will be a rebirth for those whose lives are difficult and who are being held back.

Help us understand that we cannot leave all these things to the politicians and leaders of our world.

Show us how we can recreate our human story into one that pleases you, and benefits all.

Amen.

Reflection

_Spoken from beside the baptismal font._

Refreshment,
renewal,
new life:
all offered here.

A place of commitment made either on your behalf or by you in all consciousness.

If not already poured during the Call to Worship, have some water dramatically poured into the font at this point.

United to Christ through this water, we claim our place in his family.

Today offers an opportunity to reaffirm this. You are invited to stand and recommit yourself as part of Christ's family through renewing your baptismal vows. Whether taken on your behalf or through your own request, these vows are yours.

_Baptismal vows from Book of Common Order (or form used in your tradition) used from the outline for adult baptism._

You are invited now, should you wish, to come to the font for a blessing.

As people come forward dip your fingers in the water and anoint them on their forehead with the words:

You are a beloved child of Christ.

Once everyone who wants a blessing has returned to their seats continue with this short prayer:

Lord God, acknowledging our place in your family, we give thanks for each person here. May we all know your continued blessing in our lives and go from here today, renewed, refreshed and ready to live in relationship with you.

Amen.
Prayer of Dedication

Lord we thank you that you have made us faithful stewards of all the earth; stewards too of the financial resources with which you have supplied us.

By faith we are trusted to use these gifts wisely; to look after ourselves and those we love, to support Your work through the activities of the Church, and directly in the communities and world we live.

Today we dedicate this offering and seek your blessing for its good use. In Jesus name we pray.
Amen.

Take Home Ideas

Renewal is not, nor has ever been a single event, though sometimes it is described as such. It is a process, sometimes swift, sometimes slow.

This week, whether you renewed baptismal vows or not, think about what areas of your life or community would benefit from renewal. Think about what it would take to bring that about.

Sending

Called to follow, renewed and refreshed, restored and made whole, all through the energising waters of baptism.

Praise/Hymns

Baptised in water CH4 636
Christ is our light, the bright and morning star CH4 336
Here in this place, new light is streaming CH4 623
Here to the house of God we come CH4 195
How lovely is thy dwelling place CH4 52 / MP 247
I am trusting thee Lord Jesus MP 258
I bind unto myself today CH4 638
I’m not ashamed to own my Lord CH4 645 / MP 323
Let us build a house where love can dwell CH4 198
O Jesus I have promised CH4 644 / MP 501
On Jordan’s bank CH4 344 / MP 538
One thing I ask CH4 199
Out of the flowing river CH4 335
Take this moment, time and space CH4 501
We are one family together ATAS 256
We know that Christ is raised CH4 635
When to the sacred font we came CH4 630
age group ideas
gathering

Scrabble Names   all age

You will need: a large sheet of paper or length of lining paper, markers.

Write a first name with a lot of letters vertically down the middle of the sheet of paper e.g. Jacqueline, Alexander. Get the children to fit their names in horizontally using one of the letters in the original name that also appears in their name. Build up like Scrabble. You may need more than one sheet depending on the number of children in your group. Use this as an introduction to the importance of names, belonging and baptism.

crafts

Blue Names   age 3-5

You will need: tissue paper in a variety of tones of blue ripped into small pieces, PVA glue, glue spreaders, lining paper with name of group/church in big bubble letters, crayons.

Get the children to work together to fill in bubble letters by scrunching up tissue paper into small balls and sticking them onto letters with glue. Write the children’s names around the edges of the poster and ask the children to draw little self portraits beside their names.

Talk with the children about their names and their families and how we are all part of God’s family.

Naming Tree   age 6-12

You will need: white A4 card, poster paint in blue and brown, paper plates, bowls of water, fine tip black roller pens, baby wipes, aprons or painting shirts, pencils.

Note that you may want to do this early on in your session as some paint drying is required.

Give each child a sheet of card, a pencil, a paper plate with a little bit of blue paint at one side and a little bit of brown paint at the other and a little tub with some water in it. Ask the children to draw lightly with pencil the shape of a tree trunk and a few branches on to their card. Ask the children to finger paint that in with brown paint, using the water (just a little bit or it will end up a muddy puddle) to give different tones of brown. Wipe fingers clean. Now ask the children to make fingerprint leaves / blossom on the tree using blue paint. If they make a number of prints before dipping back into paint this will give a variety of shades of blue. Wipe fingers clean. Leave painting to dry.

When you return to the craft activity, ask the children to write their names using fine tipped pens into the finger prints. They could add names of other family members and/or names of other people in their group.

Talk with the children about their families and how we are all part of God’s family, with baptism being a sign of that. Talk about baptism practices in your congregation. This could be a good opportunity to let the children ask questions about what they have observed at baptism services.

Blessing Bags   all age

You will need: gift bags in a variety of colours and sizes (you could ask folk in congregation to bring some in, we all have some waiting to be reused!), tissue paper, felt tip pens, scissors, gift ribbon, coloured card, hole punch, small gifts such as pencils, rubbers, notebooks, wrapped sweets.

Divide the children into groups of three or four with a variety of ages in each group. Give each group a gift bag. Ask the children to make ‘luggage labels’ from coloured card. You could provide a template or get the children to come up with their own shapes and designs. Ask the children to punch a hole in their tag at an appropriate point and thread gift ribbon through hole so that tags can be attached to the gift bags. Ask the children to work together to decide on a message for the tag and then to write that message using felt tip pens. The message will depend on where the gift bags are going but should link to the All Age Prayer on page 85 and reflect the idea of the church praying for children and young people as they return to school. Attach the tags to bags and fill the bags with small gifts, covering over the top with tissue paper.

Talk with the children about the importance of belonging and how we can help others to feel included in school, groups and organisations as they begin again after the summer holidays.

Pass the Blessing Bags on to a local primary school, nursery, play group, after school club, Women’s Aid. You will know the places where you have good connections in your community.
activities

Names  age 6-12

You will need: a book of baby names and the current top 100 list of names for girls and boys (easily found on the web), flip chart paper, marker pen.

The passage revolves around new life. Baptism is part of that process. Ask the children to write down their name and the names of all the people in their immediately family. Have a master sheet that you can write the names on and how many times the same name crops up.

Ask the children for their favourite girl’s and boy’s names and write them up. Which is more popular than another? If they could change their name, what would they like? Write up some of the unusual names that celebrities have given their children (readily available on the web). What do the children think of those names? Finally ask the children to invent a new Christian name. Note with them that it does not matter what we are called we are all children of God.

Singing For Joy  all age

You will need: simple musical instruments (or junk with which to make some), some music score.

The passage talks of singing for joy so ask the children to pick some of their favourite choruses and songs that they like to sing in your group. Discuss with the children why they like them (music, words, actions). Try making up words for your own group that will fit in with your church and area that praise and thank God.

If you have instruments let the children use them or make some instruments out of junk craft material. Try ‘Name that tune’, or give the children the second or third line of a chorus and ask them to identify it. For the older children show them some sheet music and give them the values of the notes and let them count out and clap out the beats.

Who Lives Where?  all age

You will need: copies of the activity sheet available on page 119, pens.

Discuss with the children who is in God’s family and then lead them onto talking about who is in their own family. What type of house do the children live in; flat, villa, bungalow, caravan. You can use this to lead into the activity sheet which asks the children to match the different homes to the correct inhabitants.

Answers are: Dog (kennel), Eskimo (igloo), Native American (wigwam), Badgers (set), Jesus (heaven), Horse (stable), Car (garage), Bird (nest), Aeroplane (hanger), Otters (holt), Bees (hive), Clothes (wardrobe), Grain (granary), Lion (set), Queen (palace), Pig (sty), Nomad (tent).

Who Lives Where?  all age

The book Sometimes I need to be hugged by Elspeth Murphy might be a good fit for today.

games

My Name Is...  age 6-12

Because this is the beginning of a new session for many churches some of the children may not know one another. Play a simple memory game to begin.

Gather everyone in a circle, start with yourself as the leader saying “My name is ______ and I like ______.” The next person in the circle then introduces themselves and follows this with an introduction to you as the preceding person. For instance they might say, “My name is Drew and I like cycling, and this is Linda who likes singing.” Carry on around the circle. The simple way would be for everyone just to mention the preceding person when they introduce themselves, so they have to listen. If you want a more challenging version then just add the next name to an increasingly long memory list. This will depend on your group size.

It is good to know each other by name and who we are but God knows this already. When a child is baptised God knows them already but they are being welcomed into God’s family.

Search It Out  all age

You will need: before the children arrive leave around the room items that people would find helpful in their life of faith during the good and bad times (such as bible, bottle of water, prayer card, bread, picture of church, praying hands, hymn book, picture of friends).

We need many things to help us in our faith as we journey just like the psalmist did. When playing the game give each team a bag to collect the items and once collected discuss the items. You call out, for example, “I need an item beginning with B in my life of faith!” The children need to find the bible. The first team to find it and put in the bag gains a point. Or “I need something to help me sing a song!” The challenge being to find the hymn book.
Preparation

Often when we read passages like this week’s we might consider how it could be applied to our individual lives. However today’s session encourages participants to consider what new life might mean for our corporate experience of church. Death and resurrection are obviously central themes within Christianity but what might they mean in the context of church?

This week might also provide an opportunity to invite members of the congregation to the group to help discuss how church has changed over the years. Their input would be beneficial for the imagination exercise.

The ability to show a YouTube video will be necessary. You will also need some art materials for the final Activity.

The Word

Read Romans 6:1-11 together choosing an appropriate translation that is clear.

Discussion

In the second instalment of the Back to the Future film franchise Marty and Doc travel forward in time to 21 October 2015. The future they find is one which has captured the imagination of millions – and one which has proven remarkably prophetic. Save for a few key oversights (the internet, mobile phones) and a couple of over-hopeful punts in the dark (flying cars), the world dreamt up by writer Bob Gale and then brought to the screen resembles our own in strange and uncanny way.

Watch the video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfJrTe-kV2A) with the group and discuss what the creators of the film got right about the future from their vantage point in the 1980s.

• The film correctly anticipates an increased use of robot technology: petrol stations these days are pretty much computerised and the prevalence of non-military drones that are becoming increasingly popular.

• The scanning of eyes and fingerprints is used in the film to check people’s identities, just as it is today.

• Almost everyone in the film at some point dons a pair of high-tech specs with remarkably Google Glass-style capabilities, such as cameras, magnification and access to some sort of unspecified database of information. They also have Bluetooth-anticipating headsets.

• Marty McFly of 2015 video-calling with a colleague, much like Skype or FaceTime.

• The film’s predicts 3D films with Jaws 19 in 3D.

• Perhaps more controversial is that the writer of Back to the Future has said he based the character Biff on Donald Trump Jr. Biff in the future is vastly more wealthy and powerful than he was in 1985.

So like the writer of Back to the Future we are going to be doing a bit of our own time travelling this morning.

Imagination Exercise: Time Travelling

Imagine going back to the year 1965.

• What would be the experience of children and young people in our congregation?

• In worship?

• Language/style/structure?

• Groups/activities offered?

• Where did they meet?

• Challenges locally?

Now bring your minds to the present day.

• What are some of the things that keep you going to the groups you go to?

• What are some of the challenges that young people face in their lives?

• Where do young people spend their time? How easily do they move around?

Now let’s move into the future, skipping ahead to 2025.

• If we were to travel forward to 2025 what would we find in the church?

• Who do you think would be the leaders?

• What does the church have to offer to children and young people?

• What will the average age of the congregation be?

• What will be our connection with local schools?

• What are other churches/agencies doing—will there be room for partnerships?

• Do we continue to do lots of different things or do we focus on one particular area?

Activity

Using some art materials design what church might look like if you were creating/establishing one from scratch. This activity could be done individually or in small groups.

• What might the building look like?

• What activities would it offer?

• What might its priorities be?

• Where would it meet?

• How might it be different from the church you currently attend?

• Would it belong to a denomination or would it be independent?

Take some time to feedback on the designs thinking particularly about any common themes that emerge.
Exploring A Living Tradition

This week and next we explore the Lord’s Supper together. Perhaps this week it would be good to talk about experiences and heritage and what the symbols in our communion service point to. These are symbols not just of bread and wine but the symbolic serving and the table itself. Next week can then be a time, the preparation complete, to serve communion to each other.

Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians is upset that the cultural division found in their society was being replicated as they shared the Lord’s Supper. The supper was and is meant to be a way of engaging with each other that sits counter culturally with the world. All the divisions they had in their daily life, rather than being laid aside at the table, were instead mirrored at the table.

Normally those who were of higher status generally had more to eat and better food while those lower down the pecking order would have less and worse food to eat. It seems in the Corinthian church people were engaging in a general meal and the communion was served as part of that. This is what causes the issue Paul is so upset about.

He suggests therefore, in order to stop people having more or less food than others, to eat at home before they come to the gathering. Go and have what you want at home and come to the supper ready to share in the story of Jesus, which is its point, rather than coming for a meal together.

It is a half response to the issue for it doesn’t change how society works, only that society doesn’t influence how the meal is served and that Jesus now becomes the focus of the supper.

It is perhaps therefore appropriate for us to think about our own traditions in the Lord’s Supper for each place has their own unique traditions and most traditions we have are not ancient but probably all shaped within the last 100 years.

For example originally communion would be served in church round the ministers kitchen table which would have been brought into the worship space (before pews), scrubbed and then communion served without the use of elders. Everyone sat round the table with a common cup and before bread was used there would have been shortbread or oatcakes.

There was a riot in Govan when the first communion table was brought into the Church of Scotland many years after the reformation. It symbolised all that the reformation wished to protest about.

Elders serving bread and wine is a fairly new thing and only came about as the norm when their status as a court of discipline went out of fashion. What were the elders to do? They no longer sat in judgement so one of the tasks they gained was to serve bread and wine from the new communion tables.

However, they do not really ‘serve’ communion. All they are doing is moving the bread and wine from the communion table to the people. We serve each other in communion, thus the double handled communion trays. It is a very strong symbol in the reformed tradition that we should serve each other. No one is more important, or has more authority to do so.

Until recently in Scotland we would fence the table after the preparatory service on the Friday or Saturday. It would literally be fenced. Today this is generally no longer the case and the table is open to all who love the Lord. Many congregations are quite flexible in how they understand that and find great...
meaning and Christian welcome in serving those of any faith or of no faith. You can’t get grace wrong. Erring on the side of generosity is more important than being cautious.

Though, interestingly, the reformers suggested that the bible be read while communion was served lest the devil distract you from the supper and the appropriate response to Jesus’ sacrifice.

Words such as ‘Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world’ which is quoted three times with the last line ‘Grant us your peace’ comes from the Orthodox tradition which we have adopted. It is perhaps the oldest part of the Church of Scotland communion tradition coming from the first millennium. In the Orthodox tradition the first line would be repeated and repeated until all the bread had been broken and the ‘grant us your peace’ line was the signal that the bread was now ready to be served.

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving which is the prayer before the breaking of bread normally concludes with a part called the Epiclesis which calls down the Holy Spirit “so that the bread which we break may be for us the communion of the body of Christ”, yet John Knox did not consider an epiclesis as necessary. Indeed some argue that the whole service is an epiclesis, setting aside these elements for no other use, and today you do not always hear this part in our tradition.

Traditions also vary on who is served first: the minister and elders or the congregation. Both offer different meanings; the tradition of minister first shows that it is not a ‘tea party’ yet whereas if the congregation is served first, the minister is seen more as the servant.

Then with the advent of children at communion, many liturgies have changed their format, becoming less funereal, simpler to understand with more story-telling, less preaching and more experiencing the community of the bread and wine in a less formal way.

No one can say ‘we have always done it this way’ in serving communion because we simply have not. The only constant in the communion tradition of a denomination like the Church of Scotland is that is has always evolved and responded to a changing culture. This takes us back to Paul who warns that the Lord’s Supper is not a cultural event. It is instead a counter-cultural event where we put all aside in order to experience the community of Jesus. It is an outworking of the story of love, sacrifice and resurrection promise in the hope that perhaps the world may model itself on the way the supper is served.

Retelling For Young People

Do Not Forget

A simple rhyme about why we have communion.

It is deliberately similar to the rhyme for next week, to reinforce the story and the simplicity of how and why Jesus asks us to remember him.

Before Jesus died, he wanted to be sure that his friends would not forget him when they didn’t see him anymore.

I wonder if he wondered, “How will they not forget? What will make them think of me—a donkey? a fishing net?”

I wonder if he wondered, “How will they not forget? What praying make them think of me—or when they see the sun set?”

I wonder if he wondered, “Oh how will they not forget? Will telling stories make them think of me—of the things that I’ve done and said?”

I wonder if he wondered, “We could have a special dinner, then every time they have their tea, they’ll think of me—it’s a winner!”

So before Jesus died, that’s what he did to be sure that his friends don’t forget him though we don’t see him anymore.

So let’s remember Jesus not just at our special dinner, but every time we have our tea, we can think of him—it’s a winner!
Remember Me?

_A dialogue about communion and remembering Jesus._

Voice A: Communion. How did it get so complicated?

Voice B: Yeah. Why can’t we keep it simple?

Voice A: Exactly. What could be simpler than eating together?

Voice B: Yep. Just sitting round a table, enjoying a meal, and remembering Jesus.

Voice A: I wonder if he thought through lots of things before deciding this was the best way to encourage us not to forget him?

Voice B: You mean, he might have thought through a whole list of ideas and ditched them one by one till he decided that eating together would be the best reminder?

Voice A: Imagine him thinking: "What habit will most help them to remember me? What about that prayer I taught them? Nope…"

Voice B: "What about whenever they lay hands on the sick? Nope…"

Voice A: “Or every time the Pharisees argue with them?”

Voice B: Nope!

Voice A: Then he thought—"I know! Dinner time."

Voice B: Whenever they eat and drink together. So simple!

Voice A: What a smart cookie, choosing the dinner table as the best place to be reminded. Do this to remember me.

Voice B: Do this to remember me. Munch munch, glug glug! Genius!

Voice A: And he didn’t start with a morsel of bread and a sip of wine like we use in church today, but a decent meal, a proper dinner, sitting down to eat together… a time to remember Jesus.

Voice B: He made the dinner table a pretty memorable place, when you think about it.

Voice A: Did he?

Voice B: Well, remember him at the table of Matthew, getting fishermen and tax collectors to sit down together.

Voice A: Right enough. He was breaking a social barrier, and got criticised for it.

Voice B: Remember him at the Pharisee’s table where he told everyone to stop vying for the best seats!

Voice A: And then he told the host that next time he should forget all his rich pals and invite people with disabilities, people with no money, people who couldn’t possibly pay him back!

Voice B: Remember him at the table of that other Pharisee, Simon, who failed in his basic hospitality.

Voice A: Then that woman came in, kissing Jesus feet and causing such embarrassment! But in Jesus’ eyes she knew about love and that’s what mattered.

Voice B: And Simon had to eat humble pie in a total reversal of expectations!

Voice A: Remember him inviting himself to the table of Zacchaeus, declaring salvation in the house of a cheat.

Voice B: Remember him at the table of Lazarus, accepting Mary’s touch like an anointing for burial.

Voice A: Then that woman came in, kissing Jesus feet and causing such embarrassment! But in Jesus’ eyes she knew about love and that’s what mattered.

Voice B: And Simon had to eat humble pie in a total reversal of expectations!

Voice A: Remember him inviting himself to the table of Zacchaeus, declaring salvation in the house of a cheat.

Voice B: Remember him at the table of Lazarus, accepting Mary’s touch like an anointing for burial.

Voice A: But being accused of waste!

Voice B: Remember him at the table in Emmaus, unrecognised, a stranger…

Voice A: …until they sat down for dinner and he broke the bread!

Pause

Voice B: “Remember me”… What was he asking us? I’m not sure that remembering Jesus is advisable!

Voice A: Do we remember what a dangerous guest he was?

Voice B: Do we remember that when it came to dinner, there was no telling him not to make a meal of it…

Voice A: Do we really want to join him at the table?

Voice B: Come to think of it, a morsel of bread and a sip of wine might do me.

Voice A: Yep, and let’s keep Communion complicated… at least that keeps it safe.
Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season.

As an image for this week use bread and wine, or set the Communion Table as per your usual tradition or simply with a goblet and loaf of bread.

Issue invitations to everyone as they come in for the service. These are invitations for the service next week (even if you have already done this as part of your tradition). The idea is to emphasise the invitation and welcome to the Lord’s table. Encourage people to think about others they would like to invite along next week and encourage them to do so in order to share in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. To do this put a note inside or on the back of the invitation.

Call to Worship

From the font of grace
to the table of remembrance;
both symbols of your love, O God.

From the font of grace
to the table of remembrance;
both moments shared with the divine.

From the font of grace
to the table of remembrance
we come in expectation
and the risen Lord meets us here.

All-Age Prayer

R rolls and sausage.
E gg and chips.
M ashed potatoes.
E nchilladas.
M acaroni cheese.
B eans on toast.
E spresso.
R oast chicken.

Whenever you eat and drink,
remember the God whose fullness fills us.
Amen.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Loving God,
we rejoice that you have
given us a world filled with wonders
in which to live and grow;
a creation which speaks
of your awesome power
in the roar of thunder and the surge of waves,
and of your gentleness
in the whisper of the breeze
and the melody of bird song.

We rejoice that you too
walked the earth as we do,
in your Son, Jesus;
that he came as we do,
in the wriggling flesh of a baby;
that he grew,
knowing the ups and downs of family life
and the fellowship of community;
that he showed strength through weakness,
authority through humility
and service through sacrifice.

We rejoice that you refused
to give death the final word,
and breathed life and love
and laughter and living
into the hearts and souls
of disciples who feared
they had been abandoned,
giving them courage and faith
to be your people in a hostile world.

As we prepare to share together
at your table,
there is much for which we need forgiveness
and much for which we seek it now.
May we know now in our hearts
that your grace is as unlimited
and indiscriminate as our failings,
and that no-one is exempt from your love.
May we eat, drink, share and rejoice together
as one family, your family.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

What we offer, Lord,
may be like crumbs from the table,
but we lay them before you
trusting you will gather them
and believing that with your blessing
they will help fill the needs of your church
and of your people.
Amen.
Reflection

An individual lost in thought (albeit the wrong thought) during a Communion service.

Would you look at that?
That elder is wearing a Polo shirt, under a jumper.
Where is the dignity?

Would you look at that?
Mary (third elder from the left) has a bright red dress on; a little bit over the top if you ask me.
Where is the respect?

Hang on a minute—
is that a child over there at the side of the church and his mum is just giving him a sweetie out of her bag to keep him quiet.
I am not sure I approve of him being here in the first place.
Know your place!

If I am not mistaken
the minister has forgotten to serve himself (or be served) and the elders are now on their way out to the congregation.
That can’t be right.
It is not the usual way we do things.
What about tradition?

Oh, dear that’s a shame—
Bill has gone up the wrong aisle, he’s mucked up.
That will cause confusion.
I wonder if someone will miss their chance to receive the bread?
What if the wine comes out too early?
They really should practise more.

Look at that big gap in the pew in front.
How is that going to work?
You can’t expect old Albert to shuffle along to pass the plate on to Kate, and she has arthritis in her hands so she will be under pressure to take it from him anyway.
Is there not a better way than this?

Oh dear.
“Sorry Alison, I was somewhere else and didn’t realise the plate had reached me”.
She didn’t need to nudge me though!
I have gone and spilled some bread.

Here’s the wine now.
Good, we are nearly done!
Wait a minute, though, this wine tastes awful.
Not like the old days when you really did get a wine with a ‘kick’.
I wish communion could be done the way it was when we had the old Session Clerk.

What was that?
The minister has muttered something about offering ‘The Peace’ to each other and people are standing up and shaking hands (some are even hugging).
All a bit much for me;
and listen to that: all the glasses are getting knocked over as people bump them. That will cause some mess to clear up if any of them break!
Well, I’m glad that’s over!

Prayer for Others and Ourselves

We came, Lord,
scraping for crumbs and you were waiting with bread fresh and filling.
We came, a trickle of sorry humanity, and you threw open the wine cellars and invited us in.
And we who were once hungry and thirsty forgot what it was like to survive on scraps, to drink the dust.

Lord God you have fed us with words soft and warm.
You have moistened our throats with refreshing promises so we cannot now forget those who still ache from lack of food, from lack of love, from lack of hope.
We cannot now forget those whose lives are dried up because of loneliness, fear and injustice.

And so we come, Lord, carrying them from barren places to meet you at this table; to find their place; to share your feast; to recognise the mealtime miracle that awaits them and sates them.

Lord, feed all your people with hope that they may rise like yeast to spread and share your good news. Quench every thirst that all souls may overflow with love.
Amen.
Reflective Prayer
All or nothing.
You seek both and neither.
When it is all about me,
the feast is fallow.
When I have nothing to bring,
the feast is a place of plenty.
When it is all about others,
the feast becomes community.
When others are considered nothing,
the feast is wasteful and wasted.
May we wait for, and wait on,
one another.

Take Home Ideas
Today you may have been invited to bring a friend along next week. You may have been given an invitation to share.
- Who would you like to bring to church with you?
Reflect on what happens when we celebrate communion.
- What do we remember?
- What do we do to take part?
Thank God for the gift of this special, holy meal.

Sending
Send us out, O God!
Sent to be friends to others,
sent to share and show your nourishing,
sent to be your messengers of hope

Praise/Hymns
A butterfly, an Easter egg
According to thy gracious word
Christ, you often sat at dinner
online at http://carolynshymns.com/christ_you_often_sat_at_dinner.html
Father God, the Lord, Creator
I come with joy, a child of God
In the name of Christ we gather
Jesus stand among us
Let us talents and tongues employ
Mothering God, you gave me birth
Now, my tongue, the mystery telling
O what a gift
Praise waits for thee in Zion, Lord
Remember me—the God who saves
online at http://carolynshymns.com/remember_me.html
Sharing together he's found
see page 120
Sing to the Lord of Christ our Sovereign Lord
The love of God come close
This is the night, dear friends
We break this bread
We come as guests invited
We turn to God when we are sorely pressed
You are called to tell the story
age group ideas

gathering

**Favourite Foods**  
*all age*

Talk with the children about their favourite foods and the variety of foods we enjoy.

Use this as a starting place for talking about communion.

**My Favourite Meal**  
*age 3-5*

You will need: paper plates, collage materials, PVA glue, glue spreaders, crayons.

Give each child a paper plate and ask them to make their favourite meal. Encourage 3D effects for example wool for spaghetti, scrunched up tissue paper for lettuce, tissue paper made into tiny balls for beans/peas and so on.

Ask the children to describe what is on their plate and to discuss meals and meal times and special meals. Discuss saying grace to thank God for food and time together. Talk about Jesus and his friends gathering for a special meal.

**Grace Cube**  
*age 6-12*

You will need: template for a cube (or prepare these before hand using thin card, a template is provided on page 121), card, felt tip pens, glue sticks, scissors, stickers.

Give each child a cube, laid out flat. Ask the children to decorate each side of the cube: drawing and colouring some of their favourite foods on four sides and writing a simple grace on two sides. Fold along lines and flaps and secure with glue to form cube.

Discuss with the children their favourite meals and meal times and special meals. Discuss saying grace to thank God for food and time together. Talk about Jesus and his friends gathering for a special meal and how Christians remember that meal.

Encourage the children to take their grace cubes home and to have them on the table or wherever they eat meals to remind them that Jesus is present with them at every meal.

**In Preparation**  
*all age*

Following on from the Craft Activities above asking the children what their favourite foods are and decorating a table cloth, it is now time to decorate a table cloth for Communion, to be placed on the Communion Table. Talk through the different ideas that could be drawn on the table cloth. For example they could tell the story of the Lord’s Supper, they could draw self portraits, crosses, hearts, or whatever they think would fit. Ask the children what they think! Talk about what your church does in preparation for celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Chat also about at the preparations Jesus made before he celebrated the Lord’s Supper with his disciples.

activities

**Say Grace!**  
*age 6-12*

You will need: jars, paper and pens.

Create a book or jar full of graces so they can take this home and use it with their families. Talk with the children about saying thanks before a meal, sometimes called a “Grace”. Encourage the children to write or draw some graces.

You could also teach them a Guiding favourite which is sung to the tune of The Addams Family:

Na na na nah (snap fingers twice)
Na na na nah (snap fingers twice)
Na na na nah (sing three times then snap fingers twice)

We thank the Lord for giving
the food we need for living
because we really need it
and we like it too!

When preparing to eat meals together as a family you say grace. As this week we prepare to share in the Lord’s Supper, next week we create this book or jar that the children can take home and share with their families.

**In Preparation**  
*all age*

Following on from the Craft Activities above asking the children what their favourite foods are and decorating a table cloth, it is now time to decorate a table cloth for Communion, to be placed on the Communion Table. Talk through the different ideas that could be drawn on the table cloth. For example they could tell the story of the Lord’s Supper, they could draw self portraits, crosses, hearts, or whatever they think would fit. Ask the children what they think! Talk about what your church does in preparation for celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Chat also about at the preparations Jesus made before he celebrated the Lord’s Supper with his disciples.

**Big Table Cloth**  
*all age*

You will need: paper table cloths (one for every four or five children), felt tip pens, food stickers.

Divide the children into groups of about four or five with a variety of ages in each group. Lay out the paper table cloths, one per table or on the floor. Ask the children to draw their favourite foods on the table cloth.

Discuss with the children favourite foods and the importance of meal times when people can gather together and talk and share what has been happening in their day. Talk about special meal times and parties. Talk about Christians gathering for meals and to remember the special meal Jesus had with his followers. Perhaps you could keep the tablecloths for next week or put them on tables for tea/coffee after church or at a special church event.

**Complete The Sentence**  
*age 6-12*

You will need: paper and pens, this week’s bible passage or verse (gauge this on the level of your own children), and bibles.

Divide the children and young people from your groups. Around the room in which you meet spread out different verses from this week’s bible passages. Miss out the main words from each verse. Have the children write down the correct word to complete the bible verse. You may want to have bibles on hand for when they get stuck.
discussion starters for teens
this is no empire

Preparation
For every church, communion will be practised differently. So this week we will be thinking about communion as a place of inclusion for all, rather than the physical practice of taking communion.

For Living It Out you will need to be able to play a song to the group. Pick a song that talks of divisions being healed or is on the theme of unity, perhaps something like "Build Up" by Fishy Music, or "Come Together" by The Beatles would be appropriate.

Opening Activity
Empires
To play empires, you need one small piece of paper and a pen for each young person.

1. The game leader gives the group a category and asks them to write down one item from the category (an example category could be "Shops in a nearby shopping centre. Answers could include "GAP", "Apple" store, or whatever.)

2. The game leader will collect in the answers, mix them up and read out all the answers to everyone in the group, ensuring the young people cannot see the handwriting on each answer.

3. The young people take it in turns to ask another young person what their answer was. (Brian would say, "I think Joan picked the "Apple" store.") If Joan did write the "Apple" store, then Joan physically moves seats in order to sit beside Brian, and in doing so joins his empire.

You continue until only one empire is left. The aim of the game is to have everyone join your empire, and not be taken over by another empire.

The Word
Read together 1 Corinthians 11: 17-34.

Activity/Discussion
After the election of Donald Trump, Brexit and the Scottish Independence referendum our thinking about who we are and how we relate to those next to us has been challenged.

- Where do you see people being divided up in society?
- What things are used to divide people up? (Perhaps gender or race or age.)
- How do you feel when people are divided up this way?

Every one of us has been divided up and experienced this. It might be through something at school, (school years, a division by birth, behaviour, the good get one thing and the bad other things), where you live (one community gets new roads, one still has potholes, one has a higher crime, another is safe). And also in church:

- Where in church do we divide people up?
- Can you think of an example where this could be good and also an example where this could be a bad thing?

- Do you think of God as a God who divides up people?

The bible passage this week is about preparing to meet together. It asks us to consider how we make sure when we meet together that we all come as equals. It encourages us to work on the things that stop us meeting together before we even come to church. If you are hungry, for instance, eat at home before you come to church.

Make a big list of the different things that are used to divide up the included and excluded.

On the list suggest ways you can work on changing those things before you come to church.

Living It Out
Communion is the space where every person comes and is accepted in order to remember Jesus. Different churches do it differently but by doing the thing at all we all join together, all across time and space. We join in this community. This is radically different to the way that the world sets out to divide us in so many different ways. Take a moment and think about the different spaces of division in life, while we listen to a song and then at the end of the time I will pray.

God of all creation,
the earth is yours,
as are we, your people.
Help us to join rather than divide,
to heal rather than hurt. Amen.
Teasing The Traditions

Perhaps one of the lessons from the Lord’s Supper is how important the story is. The whole enactment of the Supper is a story. Nothing is there for the sake of being there, but each element has a tradition and meaning.

Which other stories does the Lord’s Supper bring to mind? When we speak of grain and grape, how many other stories can we recall that speak of wheat and of wine? This week we share the story of Jesus eating on the Sabbath, and David eating from the Temple, but also there is Mana in the wilderness, the Parable of the Sower, all the images of the vine, the workers in the vineyard, the Samaritan pouring wine on the wounds of the beaten up man and on and on.

The bread and wine have the ability to open up all our stories of faith that bring us to the table as well as introduce us to those who are gathered there: Samaritans and Prodigals, tax collectors and sinners.

It is a time to remember and tell those stories, meet those people and share in the kingdom.

If you are sharing communion today, and we really hope you do, why not experience some traditions from the past where, rather than bread, use oatcakes or shortbread, an old Scottish tradition.

When serving the bread and wine, a number of people could read stories of Jesus’ parables or stories that bring back deep memories of wheat and grape from the Old Testament prophets.

It might also be a good thing to use more song from around the world using different traditions, thus seeing the table as a global meeting place sharing in the communion of living saints.

Some of the traditional words we use such as the Sanctus is more often sung in other places. There are various versions of these available.

Instead of preaching it may be a chance simply to shape the whole service round the setting of the table thus exploring the meaning of the different elements, or to tell the stories of those who sat round the table with Jesus. These stories might be all the ‘preaching’ that is needed and would allow the elements to be freed to speak for themselves. We may all come with different understandings or questions, but the supper is robust. You cannot break it. There is room for all.

In Jesus breaking the traditions of the Sabbath in the Matthew passage, might your faith community today be open to move some of the traditions we have grown up with? For example, the one who is ordained in the service is there to keep order. That is what the word ordination comes from. While she or he is the responsible one there, that may be enough to enable others to break bread, tell the story of the Last Supper (the institution), lead the prayers of Thanksgiving, and, if you do not include the epiclesis (see last week’s notes) which are the words an ordained person ought to read as he or she has the authority to call the Spirit to set aside the bread and wine, then you might be able to shape a communion service where other people lead and serve.

There is a lot in our traditions that hold the story of our communities and faith journey, our faith and our doctrine. These are what we build on as we evolve our traditions. No one changes a tradition for the sake of being trendy but by creating spaces where we experience these traditions anew, we might be opened up to new relationships with each other and with Jesus.
the story

Broken And Poured

A cluster of resonances from scripture about things broken and poured out. This could be read by one or a few voices. If desired, this could be followed by a short time of conversation in pairs or small groups. Invite people to respond to this or a similar question: When has the breaking or pouring out of something, enabled you to grow closer to others and/or to God?

Bread broken.
Laws broken.
Commandments broken.
Covenants broken.

Wine poured out.
Smoke pouring from a mountain.
Rain pouring for forty days and nights.
Manna pouring like rain from heaven.
Rain pouring after a three year drought.

Pause

Bread broken.
My sacrifice is a broken spirit.
The bows of the mighty are broken.
You will be called repairer of broken walls.

Wine poured out.
Olive oil poured on memorial stones.
Jars of water pouring over wood and filling a trench.
A vision of fire pouring from a throne.
Let justice pour down like a river.

Pause

Retelling For Young People

Remember Me!

A simple rhyme to be used while celebrating communion. You could cue the children to listen for the words “He said...” so that everyone joins in repeating “Remember me!” You could ask the children what they remember about Jesus, and add in extra verses with their own words and memories.

Ordinary wine,
ordinary bread -
making them special
just as Jesus said.

Sitting round the table,
sharing our food,
remembering Jesus,
so, what did he do?

He taught us to pray.
He helped a blind man see.
He rode on a donkey.
He said “Remember me!”

He fed 5000 people.
He calmed a stormy sea.
He chose twelve disciples.
He said “Remember me!”

He grew up in Nazareth.
He saw Zacchaeus up a tree.
He told wonderful stories.
He said “Remember me!”

Every time we eat,
breakfast, lunch or tea,
it’s time to think of Jesus,
he said “Remember me!”

Bread broken.
The Lord is near to the broken hearted.
Job scraped himself with a piece of broken pottery.
Surely no-one turns against a broken person.

Wine poured out.
Hannah pouring out her prayers.
Six measures of barley poured into Ruth’s shawl.
Olive oil never ceasing to pour from a widow’s jug.
Twelve years of a woman’s body haemorrhaging.

Pause

Bread broken.
God led them from darkness and broke their chains.
I have broken the bars of your yoke and let you walk upright.
We have escaped like a bird from a broken snare.

Wine poured out.
Vinegar poured on a wound.
New wine must be poured into new wineskins.
The spirit poured on us generously through Jesus Christ.
Water poured into a basin, a towel around his waist.

Pause

Bread broken.
Wine poured out.
Bread broken.
Wine poured out.
worship ideas

Through the Season Activity

Please visit pages 4 and 5 where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season.

As an image for this week use bread and wine, or set the Communion Table as per your usual tradition or simply with a goblet and loaf of bread.

We would encourage you to celebrate the Lord’s Supper as part of this week's worship.

Ensure everyone is warmly welcomed as a guest. Have extra people on welcome duty to escort people to their seats. Perhaps offer a welcome drink/sweet/canape...

Call to Worship

To the table of remembrance we come, the guests of honour, each and everyone of us.

To the table of remembrance we come, our place assured, the meal prepared.

To the table of remembrance we come, in hope and in love, ready to receive.

To the table of remembrance we come, O Lord nourish us and quench our thirst for you.

To the table of remembrance we come.

Responses

Leader: To the table of remembrance we come, the guests of honour, each of us welcome.

All: the guests of honour, each of us welcome.

Leader: To the table of remembrance we come, our place assured, the meal prepared.

All: our place assured, the meal prepared.

Leader: To the table of remembrance we come, in hope and in love, ready to receive.

All: in hope and in love, ready to receive.

Leader: To the table of remembrance we come, O Lord nourish us and quench our thirst for you.

All: O Lord, nourish us and quench our thirst for you.

Leader: To the table of remembrance we come.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Today, Lord, we are guests, guests at a feast of your preparing. A banquet of promises. A spread of love. A mealtime of grace.

We come, hoping to look our best, but with gifts inadequate, yet welcome all the same.

We come, on our best behaviour, knowing we have let you down, yet hopeful of acceptance.

We come recognising we have failed to invite others, yet knowing you have laid a place for them.

We come, anticipating conversation with you, and knowing you have much to say.

Forgive us, Lord, if our manners have not met your expectation, if we have been too greedy or reluctant to wait our turn.

May we be humble enough to serve you with what we have. And may the promises, love and grace you offer in abundance, be ours to give away. Amen.

All-Age Prayer

I followed the man with the water and he brought me to a house.

I followed the man at the door and he led me to a table.

I ate and drank with friends. and paused and wondered at the bread and wine in our hands.

And I was blessed, then broken, as friendship was fractured amidst talk of blood spilled.

And I followed the crowd to a court room, and to a hill, and to a tomb, and to a garden where I followed the man with the water.
Prayer for Others and Ourselves

You made a promise, Lord, when you raised the cup and spoke of a kingdom not of this world. That promise remains as does our hope of a kingdom come but not yet fulfilled.

And so we raise a glass, Lord, to the little glimpses of goodness which we see among us, and which hint at your presence and your being among us.

We pause, the cup at our lips, to name those who thirst for a better, fairer, richer life.

We drink, our throats refreshed by the words you offer, and the hope you embody for all people.

We lay down our glass, Lord, ready to be replenished with your grace and your goodness, that we might drink of it and offer it to others.

You made a promise, Lord, when you raised the cup and spoke of a kingdom not of this world. May we raise ourselves in service that your kingdom come, your will be done.

Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

You have given us the greatest gift of all, Lord, in your Son, Jesus.

We have shared his story and now we prepare to taste his goodness.

Bless these gifts, make them great and good in the service of your kingdom.

Amen.

Reflective Prayer

What kind of conversation is this that speaks of body, blood and betrayal at the dinner table?

What kind of meal is this that entertains crooks and doubters with promises of heaven?

What kind of man is this who hands away his life as easily as a piece of bread?

What kind of love is this that gives itself completely amidst the hostile and the ignorant?

What kind of God is this that asks us to pull up a chair and join him at a table of spilled wine and treachery?

My God. My God. Who won't forsake me.

Amen.
Reflection

Gather together menus from fast food restaurants of varied food styles (for example, Indian, Chinese, Fish and Chips, Pizza). It might be possible to bring a collection of food containers or packaging from well-known take-away outlets and maybe even some balloons with logos and company names.

Create an area at the front of the sanctuary, designed to be like a fast-food-outlet. Ask someone to stand there and act out the part of a sales person (in suitable attire if possible).

Dialogue With Congregation

Looking for congregation to interact with as the scene unfolds.

"Next Customer please... who is hungry?

"What would you like... what can I tempt you with?

"Food glorious food! Nothing like a nice offering of food. Especially if you are really hungry... especially if you've not cooked it.... especially if someone prepares and shares it with you... especially if you are sharing it with others who have been invited to share in the meal too.

"Do you know food features frequently in the stories of the Bible? Particularly interesting are the stories where food is provided for those who are hungry, or food is served at a gathering where Jesus meets people, sometimes his followers, sometimes even strangers.

"The grain and the grape feature strongly. In such stories as Mana in the wilderness, the Parable of the Sower, all the images of the vine, the workers in the vineyard, Jesus eating with Zacchaeus, Jesus eating with his friends for the last time.

"I think food in the Bible, (it's provision, and its abundance), and the eating of food is a symbol of the generosity of God. God supplies us with what we need: the basic necessities and the luxuries, and I think the 'eating together stories' are also a symbol of the bringing together of all types of humanity! In the commonality of being the children of the 'One' God, Father and Mother of us all' we eat together.

"So maybe later as we share a meal together—a meal of grain and grape—we will know the privilege of being supplied by God with all we need. We remember Jesus' sacrifice is without question the greatest source of our abundance. Maybe we will also take heart in sharing fellowship and 'oneness' with those who gather beside us."

Take Home Ideas

This week there may have been party food, there may have been visitors if people brought friends. Did you?

This week reflect again on the Lord's Supper. Think especially of the two elements, bread and wine. Maybe have a go at making bread this week. As you do, feel the flour mix change as you knead it: ask God to work through you to change what needs to change, and give thanks for the changes God can bring about in us.

Praise/Hymns

All is ready for the Feast! CH4 373
Eat this bread, drink this cup CH4 661
Father most loving CH4 657
Here is bread, here is wine MP 842
I come with joy, a child of God CH4 656
Jesus calls us here to meet CH4 510
Now, my tongue, the mystery telling CH4 667
Put peace into each other's hands CH4 676
Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast CH4 674
Take and eat CH4 670
This is the body of Christ CH4 799
We come as guests invited MP 723
When I receive the peace of Christ CH4 566
When we are tempted to deny your Son CH4 400
We turn to God when we are sorely pressed CH4 393
Ye gates, lift up your heads CH4 19

Sending

Send us out, O God!
Sent to celebrate the feast,
sent to share the joy of belonging,
sent to share you with all who will hear.
age group ideas
gathering

**Taste And See**  
_all age_

You will need: a range of different kinds of bread (tortilla, naan, baguette, crusty roll, pitta, pretzel, plain, seeded, wholemeal). Check for any allergies (you may need to have some gluten free bread).

Discuss with the children what their favourite kind of bread is. Cut breads up and have a little tasting session. Use this as a way into talking about communion.

**Crafts**

**Breadstick Pictures**  
_age 3-5_

You will need: paper plates, plastic cups, wet wipes, breadsticks, grapes (cut in half to avoid choking hazard) cheese/carrots cut into small cubes, blackcurrant juice, picnic rug, spreading cheese, jam, plastic knives.

Give each child a paper plate. Ask the children to 'draw' a picnic picture using foods, such as breadsticks for table, cubes of carrot/cheese for food, grapes for cups. The children can use spreading cheese and/or jam to stick the bits together.

Talk about the bread and wine Jesus shared with his disciples and how Jesus told them to repeat this meal to help them remember his love. Talk about how we still do this in church. Give the children some juice and spend time eating together.

**Picnic Communion**  
_all age_

You will need: the tablecloth(s) the children made last week, paper plates, plastic cups, blackcurrant juice, part-baked rolls, baking trays, access to oven, various sandwich fillings (such as jam or spreading cheese), plastic knives.

Bake the rolls then get the children to make sandwiches using them.

Set the food and drinks out on tablecloths on the floor, like a picnic (or go outside if weather is nice). Share the food and discuss the bread and wine Jesus shared with his disciples and how he told his disciples to repeat this meal to remember his love. Discuss with the children ways this meal is celebrated in church today.

**Baking Bread**  
_age 6-12_

You will need: ingredients required for bread rolls, utensils and recipe for simple bread making (perhaps you or someone in your congregation has a favourite or source one online), plastic cups, blackcurrant juice.

Make bread rolls. Work out what suits your group, time and resources best (bread maker, dough already prepared with children doing a little kneading, par baked rolls, or have someone demonstrate making them but have a “here’s one I prepared earlier” ready.

Talk about the bread and wine Jesus shared with his disciples and how Jesus told them whenever they repeat this meal to remember his love. Talk about how we still do this in church. Give the children some juice and spend time eating together.
activities

Communion  age 6-12
You will need: images of or actual communion elements (bread and wine/juice).

Talk through a communion service with the older children within this group. Explain what happens and what everything is used for and the different roles each person plays within the service. After everything has been explained invite the children to act out their own Communion Service for each other.

When being given the opportunity to learn through the play the children in your group will understand what Communion is better and what happens within the service.

Sharing Together  all age
You will need: snack foods and drinks (being aware of any allergies).

Sit down together and share in a meal just as Jesus did with his disciples. As you eat, share the story of the Lord’s Supper with the children.

Explain that Jesus shared a meal with his friends often, but the last meal he shared with them was extra special. It is described in many parts of the New Testament.

Serving The Elements  all age
You will need: time to rehearse and meet with elders.

If the congregation is celebrating the Lord’s Supper today, discuss the possibility of this being an all-age family communion service and with the worship leaders explore the possibility of the children helping to serve the bread and wine to the congregation. Many churches already do this on occasion and it is a very meaningful way to incorporate all ages together in this sacrament.

It is often helpful to have an elder (or equivalent) shadow each child so that they are not anxious about going to the wrong place.

games

Thank You  age 3-5
You will need: soft ball.

Gather the children sitting in a circle on the floor. Roll the ball across the centre of the circle towards one of the children. When they catch it, they need to say something for which they want to say thank you (for example, I am thankful for my friends, I am thankful for the food I eat, I am thankful for my family). They then roll the ball across the circle to another child who does the same. Repeat until everyone has had a chance to participate.

You can mention how Jesus always said a word of thanks before eating a meal with his friends or family. It is good to follow his example.

Elemental Relay  all age
You will need: paper plates, crackers, plastic cups, water, red food colouring, broom and mop.

Prepare plates with a few crackers (with lots of spares ready), fill cups with water dyed red with food colouring (this will be less sticky for clean up than using diluting juice) on a table at the far end of your meeting room/hall.

Form up teams of mixed ages. This is a relay race. The first child in each team has to run up to the table and in one hand take a paper plate and in the other hand a cup. They then have to run back (trying not to drop the crackers or spill the wine) to their team running all the way around the team before heading back to the table to drop the plate and cup back. If they still have crackers and wine then it is a successful circuit and the team gets a point. The player runs back to their team and the next player runs up to start. In the gap you may need to refill the cup and add crackers back to the plate.

The team with the highest score wins after everyone has had a chance. Thus, it is not necessarily the fastest team that will be the winner, but rather the more careful.

Get the children to help clean up afterwards!

Remember Me  all age
You will need: different pictures or items relating to various bible stories, a tray and cloth to cover the tray.

Place all the pictures/items on the tray one by one explaining why you have chosen them (and what story they remind you about from Jesus’ life).

Once the tray is complete, invite the children to look at the pictures/items for a short amount of time. Cover the tray and remove one picture/item. Reveal the items and ask the children to remember and name the picture/item you have taken away and which story it related to.

You can play this game again and again. Each time take another picture/item away to see if the children remember what was on the tray and the stories they related to.

Jesus invites us at the Lord’s table to ‘Do this in remembrance of me’.
discussion starters for teens
hungry to celebrate

Preparation
There is encouragement for congregations to celebrate the Lord’s Supper this week so you may need to keep that in mind and if your congregation is doing so, to make sure the young people can participate in that.

This week you need a variety of snacks, a large, long piece of paper to write on, two pieces of flip chart paper together would work. For Living It Out you need paper sheets and pen.

Opening Activity
Preparing Our Hunger
Have a range of snacks and food stuffs appropriate for the group to take and eat.

Ask each young person what they would pick and what they like about their selection. This relates directly to the reading last week.

The Word
Read all three readings asking for different voices for each one: 1 Samuel 21:1-9, Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 14:12-25. Having a few different versions of the Bible to choose from would be good.

Activity/Discussion
Preparing For Communion
If you visit different churches you will find that the celebration of communion is done very differently in different denominations or individual churches. Even the name is different: some call it Eucharist, some Mass, some Communion, for instance. Some churches will follow an order with the same words every time, others will have a variety of ways of doing communion.

As a group, try on a big piece of paper to make a time line of what happens at communion in order, start with every part of the process. Who gets the communion cups and prepares them, who gets the wine and bread, all the way through to who is the last person to leave the church today. Be creative as you put these things down on the paper to tell the story of how communion happens.

Then discuss the following as a group:

- Which part of communion do you think is the most important?
- Which part of communion would you like to be involved in?

Living It Out
Preparing Ourselves
We are going to do business with God. To join two believers across time and space, to join with God. As part of this we want to do three things:

- think of God,
- think of others,
- think of ourselves.

Think of three words to describe how you feel about God, others and yourself. (For example: absent, smelly, unsure or loving, friends, keen).

Ask each young person to share if they want their three words and write them on piece of flip chart paper or similar for all to see.

Ask everyone to use their three words and put them into this prayer.

God who is ______
be with us, and challenge us in order to make this right.
Help us to see others
just like us even when just now
we think of them as ______.
Be with us, and challenge us in order to make this right.

We see ourselves as ______
let us see ourselves as you see us.
Be with us, and challenge us in order to make this right.

You could to finish the gathering read the prayer with everyone’s contributions in each of the gaps as a corporate prayer.
extra resources and activity sheets
Which is the longest line?

Puzzle 1

(a)

(b)

Puzzle 2

(a)

(b)
How Blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He’s the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him.

Long before he laid down earth’s foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love.

Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we’re a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free!

He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.

It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.

It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first instalment on what’s coming, a reminder that we’ll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

Ephesians 1: 3-14
(The Message, by Eugene Peterson)
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Gifts and Talents

1. How long have you been a member of this community?

2. How does the church community ask about people’s skills and talents?

3. What has the church done based on people’s skills or abilities in the past? (For example, a football team, craft group, bible study)

4. What skills, talents or gifts do you use to help people in the community?

5. How does the community help you use your skills, talents and gifts outside the community in the wider world?
Who needs armour?

Lots of people in their jobs have to wear clothes that protect them. Can you unscramble these anagrams to find the different jobs?

Song user
Ice lop
Older sis
Transformable lay cape oil
Remits sin
Ex rob
Dare or work
En rim
Taunts oar
Deserved a pie
Which castle is which?

These Scottish castles have been safe places for many families over hundreds of years. Can you match the castle to the correct name?

Balmoral Castle
Castle of Mey
Edinburgh Castle
Eilean Donan Castle
Glamis Castle
Stirling Castle
Know God Quiz

How well do you know God? See how many of these questions you can get right.

1. What was the first thing God created?

2. What is the symbol of God’s promise to Noah?

3. How many Commandments did God give Moses?

4. What is another name for God found in the bible?

5. God is ‘ovel’ (anagram)

6. Who is the son of God?

7. God is three different persons; God, Jesus and who else?

8. What is called when all three are mentioned?

9. God is where?

10. How do we communicate with God?

11. Because of Jesus God forgives us our _____?

12. We are all _______ of God!
**Who Lives Where?**

Can you think of the name of the places which would be home to the following? Connect with a line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
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Sharing Together He's Found

Chorus  
Praise to the God of all the earth,  
share in his grace and peace.  
Praise from his children who from their birth  
are welcome to share in his feast.

1. The wedding was fun, until no more wine,  
bottles lay on the ground.  
Jesus said, 'Fill them with water and  
taste.'  
Sharing together he's found.  
Praise to the God...

2. A boy gave his lunch: five loaves and two fish,  
wasn't a lot to go round.  
Jesus said, 'Thank you', and blessed what he had.  
Sharing together he's found.  
Praise to the God...

3. Breaking the bread with all of his friends,  
passing the wine around,  
Jesus said, 'Do this and remember me'.  
Sharing together he's found.  
Praise to the God...

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You may want to copy this enlarged onto A3 paper/card.