

Collective Worship Under the Current Restrictions

Introduction

Collective worship has always been central in Church of England schools, but in the current situation, our shared experience of worship takes on a new role and importance. It can play a crucial role in our recovery as we move towards a place in which everyone is able to thrive once again. It can:

- help re-establish familiar, comforting routines for our pupils after lockdown,
- remind about and reinforce the school's Christian vision and values that underpin the life of the school,
- draw together our school communities in shared worship experiences, so reinforcing a sense of belonging for all,
- enable us, in a sensitive and age appropriate way to handle some of the issues arising from lockdown, inspired by the message of hope within Christianity and the teaching of Jesus,
- provide opportunities for corporate and personal prayer and thanksgiving.

With the guidance aiming to limit contact between groups of pupils and staff as much as possible, we recognise that it is not appropriate at this time to gather all pupils and staff into a school hall for worship. Thankfully, however, this does not mean that worship cannot take place. Here are just a few ways in which your collective worship can continue and can flourish in the months ahead.

A framework for Class Worship

With the restrictions upon schools as they are, acts of collective worship will most likely take place in the small class groups or "pods" that schools are establishing. This may mean that, in many cases, they will be led by members of staff or pupils who are less familiar with leading worship. A clear, simple framework for them to follow, plus effective resources to use, can support them in their task.

In Church of England schools, each act of collective worship includes familiar and regular elements. These include some of the words that are spoken, the actions that take place and the order in which things happen. This pattern and flow to worship can be called the School Liturgy. These elements fall into four phases common in each act of worship —gathering, engaging, responding, sending.

Gathering—Marking the start of the worship and drawing everyone together. This may include a specific form of welcome, a regular prayer, a call and response, specific actions such as lighting a candle etc.

Engaging—Communicating the message of the worship and stimulating thinking, for example telling and explaining a bible story, investigating a particular theme, talking about a current topical issue etc.

Responding— Giving opportunity for individual thought about and response to the message / challenge. This may include pupils sharing their ideas, a time of silent and / or guided reflection, prayers in response to the theme etc.

Sending— Marking the end of the worship and sending everyone out with purpose. This may include a challenge to apply what they have learnt from the theme, a closing prayer, a call and response, specific actions such as extinguishing the candle etc.

Every school's worship will be different, however, identifying the regular elements that matter to your school, may help leadership create a simplified version for use in classes and small groups. An example of a class (or small group) liturgy is below. **[NB. It is not the content of the example that is important—yours will reflect collective worship in your own school.]**

Example of a Class or Small Group Liturgy for Collective Worship	
Gathering	Welcome: Leader: "The Lord is here." Response: "His Spirit is with us."
	Light a large candle and say - Leader: "Jesus is the light of the World." Response: "Lord Jesus, shine upon us."
Engaging	Planned Resource / Theme
Responding	Discuss the pupils' response to and thoughts about the theme of the worship.
	Reflection: Have a short time of silence for guided reflection on the theme.
	Prayers: Say the Lord's Prayer, followed by a shared prayer for the week.
	Sing a worship song.
Sending	Extinguish the candle , saying together - "May the light of God shine from us and the peace of God be with us always. Amen."
	Say the Grace together: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen."

This shared liturgy can help make each act of worship a shared collective experience. This can be further enhanced by the use of the same planning for the worship, for example everyone considering the same Bible story or topic, although delivered in an age appropriate way.

It may also be beneficial to introduce additional elements that are shared to enhance this sense of the collective, for example, saying a shared weekly prayer for the week in each act of worship or using a common worship song.

Quality Resources

It will be important to provide resources to support those staff or pupils who are leading the acts of worship, particularly for the engaging and responding elements of the worship. Many schools have a bank of resources already available for this purpose. Below is a list of high quality resources that may be useful to schools in the current circumstances.

- **The Church of England / Oak National Academy:** [Weekly assemblies](#)
- **Diocese of Guildford:** [Our school: Together-Apart](#)
[Ideas for simple reflective prayer stations at home or in the classroom](#)
- **Diocese of St Albans:** [Ideas for worship at home \(or at school\).](#)
- **Diocese of Oxford:** [Finding your way – Compass Worship](#)
- **Specifically for secondary school age students:** [Saint Mary Redcliffe and Temple School once a week worship](#)
- **Assemblies.org:** <https://www.assemblies.org.uk>
- **Picture News:** (by subscription) <https://www.picture-news.co.uk/>
- **Prayer Spaces in Schools;** and can be adapted for use at home, free registration required.
 - Prayers: <https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/resources/177>
 - Prayer spaces: <https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/prayer-spaces-at-home>
- **IsingPop:** Songs available on their YouTube channel, <https://www.isingpop.org/>
- **Out of the Ark Music:** @home resources free and offering a song a day. <https://www.outoftheark.co.uk/>

Opportunities and Possibilities

Whilst the current restrictions do present challenges, it is also possible to see the additional opportunities for innovation and development that they provide.

Pupil leadership of collective worship – the small peer groups in which worship will take place provide a great opportunity to encourage pupils to develop their capacity for leading collective worship. This is in line with the expectations of the SIAMS Evaluation Schedule (2018) and can benefit the school in the long term.

Whole School Worship using conference call applications – Not all schools are comfortable using conference call applications in school, but for those who are they could provide a way of continuing to have occasional whole school worship together. These applications, such as Zoom, Teams etc. can enable a single leader of worship to be visible to each class simultaneously via their interactive whiteboard.

Use of Video – Some schools have been continuing to provide collective worship for their pupils at home under lockdown by recording videos of worship that can be accessed at home. Videos of this sort can be recorded and used by staff or pupil groups to contribute to collective worship moving forward. These shared videos will further enhance the sense of the collective.

Expertise in Local churches – Most church schools have close links with their parish church and / or other local churches. Many ministers of churches have become skilled at producing worship, either live or on video to support their congregations and would be happy to use these new capabilities to continue to lead worship in school. This could further enhance your relationship with your parish church even while visitors are not allowed in schools.

Singing together – Singing the same song in class based collective worship can add to the sense of it being a shared experience. There is, however, something very special about singing together. For those schools that are comfortable using a conference call application, it would be possible to broadcast the backing track to every classroom simultaneously, as with the whole school worship above. With classroom doors open, the sound of the school joined in singing the same song together could be very stirring.

Conclusion

Collective worship is at the heart of our schools. Some of the ideas above may support you in ensuring that collective worship continues to fulfil this role and, in the process, to help us to move positively through this difficult time towards a time of renewed flourishing.

We know that the best ideas and most innovative solutions come from our schools. We would love to hear how you are delivering worship in your schools so we can share experiences with others.

If you have any questions or would like further support in this or any other areas then please contact your named adviser.