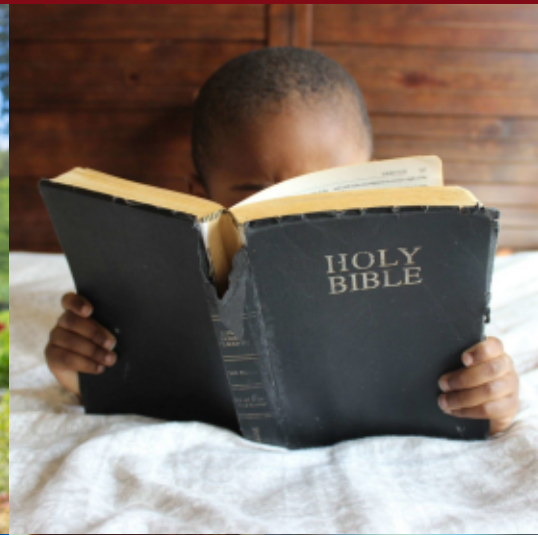




# Everyone can know



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## EVERYONE CAN KNOW

Collective worship in multifaith schools

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### Contributors

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# WAY IN

The collective worship outlines in this set were written by some of Scripture Union's schools staff who regularly worked in schools where the pupils were of many faiths and beliefs, and Christians were in the minority. One regular aspect of this work was taking assemblies, or leading 'acts of collective worship' to use the legal title. This raises several issues:

- Is it appropriate to have Christian collective worship in a school where many (or all) of the pupils are of other faiths?
- How should we present the truths of Christianity in a way which doesn't alienate pupils or staff?
- What does the Christian faith have to say to pupils of different faiths?
- What should the aim be of Christian collective worship in such schools?

Our aim for this resource is to help you think about these questions, to come to some conclusions and to equip you to do the task. Most of the ideas in the resource are, therefore, very practical. Hopefully, as you look through the ideas, you'll begin to see how we have started to grapple with these and other issues and come to understand some of the solutions we've come up with. Working within the context of other faiths inevitably raises issues where people disagree and where there is no 'right' answer. We hope that the 'Issues to think about' section included in these introductory pages will help you assess your views and develop your work.

We do not explain the legal aspects of collective worship in schools. Many other books have already covered that ground in detail. If you are not sure of the legal requirements please refer to other Scripture Union's collective worship books for the information or to [\(link\)](#)

Suffice it to say, collective worship is compulsory in schools, and apart from the few which have had 'a determination' (a technical term meaning a special ruling exempting them from the legal requirement) the collective worship has to be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'. Given that context, we are writing from the standpoint that the Christian faith does have something to say to everybody. We see that it is possible to present ideas from the Christian faith in such a way that there is something of value for everyone present, and a message to take away. We believe that the Christian faith is holistic, and that God is concerned with every aspect of people's development – their physical, moral and educational growth, as well as spiritual. To that end, many of the assemblies have a moral application, or encourage pupils to think about how they treat people or the world. We also believe, and know, that presenting the Christian faith is not mainly about what is dramatic and exciting; more often it is a slow and steady process. Our aim in the assemblies is not to present the entire Christian message in one 'hit and run' visit, but to be part of an ongoing commitment and relationship with the school.



## THE COLLECTIVE WORSHIP OUTLINES

The outlines are grouped in six themes: God's special messengers; Faith issues; Life and death; Family; People who needed help; and Festivals. The material for the outlines has been chosen so that it will resonate with the vocabulary (eg 'pilgrimage') and values (eg family) of pupils from whichever belief or faith they come.

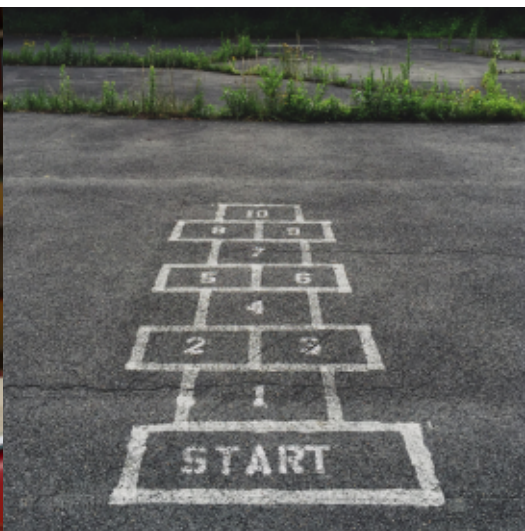
Many of the outlines include a story from the Bible, particularly in the theme section 'People who needed help'. Bible stories, of course, have an educational value of their own, apart from their use in an assembly. Stories are also intrinsically enjoyable and are a good means for helping pupils to learn about and consider truths important to Christians.

The story outlines included in the collective worship given here are not intended to be recited word perfect! Often the version given in the outline emphasises a particular point. Use the story outlines to help you work out your own telling of the story. Prepare your telling of the story well, and always, if possible, tell it from memory.

All the collective worship outlines have been written in a set style to help you understand and use them easily. For each there is a stated learning aim and Bible base. If possible, read the Bible verses in advance. They are the basis for the teaching in the collective worship, although they might not be used or quoted directly in the outline. Make sure you are thoroughly familiar with the material before taking the session.

The content section will almost certainly need adapting to fit your situation, as only you know the issues and sensitivities relevant to a particular school. Different subjects will be acceptable in different schools, sometimes depending on who is leading them. The outlines are intended for use mainly with Key Stage 2, but many can be adapted for use with Key Stage 3. Think about your audience in advance and be ready to adjust your vocabulary and illustrations as appropriate to the age level you will be working with. For some outlines there are alternative suggestions where Key Stage 1 is present either on their own, or as part of a whole primary school act of collective worship.

Some outlines include photocopiables which you are, of course, free to copy for use with the collective worship outline. Or there are suggestions for PowerPoint slides.



# ISSUES TO THINK ABOUT

## **SHOULD COLLECTIVE WORSHIP BE COMPARATIVE OR DISTINCTIVELY CHRISTIAN?**

### **The comparative approach**

One of the issues of multi-faith work is about how much we try to compare religions, or try to show how faiths are distinct from each other. The comparative argument says that we need to start from where the pupils are, and create links from their religious practice to the Christian material. So, for example, people might refer to the Qur'an as a Holy Book, and then go on to say that Christians have a Holy Book too, called the Bible. Or people might use the example of Sikhs going to a Gurdwara to pray, to say that Christians go to church. One outworking of this is comparing Jesus and Mohammed and Guru Nanak as founders of religions; or looking at similar rituals across the faiths such as weddings and other rites of passage.

### **The distinctive approach**

The distinctive argument says that by always comparing religions we imply that they are all equally valid and that there is little to distinguish between them. So if we are going to start from where the pupils are, we need to find more 'neutral' examples, such as programmes they watch on TV or things they do at school. We then go on to show what the Christian faith says about those issues. This avoids implying that all faiths are the same, and also avoids making the pupils feel as if you are criticising their faith. Once they think we are doing that, they will almost certainly become defensive and not listen as openly. This approach faces the criticism that it can distance Christianity from a large part of the pupils' lives and make it seem more like just one more interesting subject to learn about.

In this book we have gone for the distinctively Christian approach. We believe it is important to respect the faith of others, but also to present the distinctive truth claims of Christianity in ways that are sensitive and appropriate. To that end, in each outline we provide an application that gives 'A Christian viewpoint' and an application 'For everyone' – that is for anybody. By separating these out we believe we are being faithful to the biblical text and are presenting a Christian truth and a challenge for all pupils. This

helps to show that the Bible is relevant for all people, yet has distinctive claims, which we recognise not all pupils will wish to accept. Choose which application you think is most appropriate to the school you are working in, or use a combination of both.

## **THE 'RESPONSE'**

### **Does 'response' mean prayer?**

The final part of the collective worship is the response section. OFSTED criteria for collective worship includes the expectation that each act of collective worship will give an opportunity for the pupils to respond to what has been said. However, this does not have to be a prayer. The time of response could be listening to a poem, reflecting on our feelings or attitudes, or it might be a time of silence or listening to music. If we are going to pray it raises other issues for us to consider.

### **Should we ask the pupils to pray?**

One solution to this question is to offer pupils the opportunity to pray if they want to. Every time you pray in collective worship, you could say something like this: 'I'm going to say a prayer. If you want to pray, then listen carefully and at the end say "Amen" which means you agree. If you don't want to pray, or you are not allowed to, then just sit quietly and think about the assembly and how you might rise to the challenge of it today and from now on.' Sometimes all the pupils will say 'Amen'; other times only a few pupils will join in. But this approach has proved acceptable to teaching staff who were wary about any prayer at all in an assembly.

### **Should you pray 'in Jesus' name' in collective worship?**

Another issue is the words we choose to use in a prayer. You might feel it is important to always pray in Jesus' name to show it is a Christian prayer. But doing this may exclude some pupils from joining in. On the other hand you might want to pray to 'God', 'Lord', 'Heavenly Father' or another name, and allow the pupils to interpret that as they want to, whilst being sure for yourself that you are praying through Jesus. Some schools will already have thought through this question, and agreed upon a form of words

with which all are comfortable eg 'Loving Lord'. It is worth asking the school about this before leading collective worship there for the first time. Where an outline includes a suggested prayer, we have avoided concluding with the words 'in Jesus' name', but you might feel happier including them.

## **THE BIBLE**

### **Should you treat the Bible (the physical book) with special reverence?**

Some pupils may be offended if you appear to treat the Bible casually. On the other hand, perhaps you should treat it as you always do, to demonstrate the difference between Christianity and other faiths?, and to show that Christians do not have the regulations concerning the treatment of the 'holy book' common to some other faiths.

Each of the outlines in this resource is based on a Bible passage, and obviously the way pupils see Christians use the Bible will be of much greater significance to pupils who are used to handling their 'holy book' in ways very different ways. One of the problems of comparing religions is that it is possible to talk about holy books as if they were easily comparable. Yet the way a Muslim regards the Qur'an is very different to a Sikh view of the Guru Granth, or the Christian view of the Bible. For example, Sikhs speak about the Guru Granth as a person. The Qur'an is only regarded as the word of Allah when it is in Arabic and Muslims have to perform careful ablutions before handling it.

So how should we handle the Bible in this situation? If we take into collective worship an old battered Bible and leave it lying around, does this imply disregard for the Word of God? Probably yes, but if we explain that it is battered because we read it every day, and we want it with us, so we carry it everywhere, we might start to help pupils see that, for Christians, the Bible is not treated the same way as theirs. You might find staff are wary about you reading from the Bible in school. This can be very powerful when done well in collective worship, but it is worth checking with the staff that they are happy for you to do this.

## **JESUS**

### **Should you show 'pictures' of Jesus, or ask pupils to play the part of Jesus?**

After all it is collective worship led by Christian. Or, should you recognise the offence this may cause and, out of respect for those with commitments to their faith, refrain from using these methods?

Obviously, in collective worship book about Christianity, Jesus is going to be talked about. We are not ashamed to say that the Christian belief is that Jesus is the Son of God. But how far should we go in presenting Jesus, if some of our methods offend pupils, particularly Muslims? Islam does not allow pictures of the prophets and, as they consider Jesus to be a prophet, to have a picture of him might cause offence. On the other hand, Christianity allows pictures. So we could be accused of Islamising Christianity if we always adhere to Islamic regulations. The answer to this issue will almost certainly lie in your own convictions, in your particular situation, and in your relationship with the school. As a general rule, it's probably best not to use a picture of Jesus on a first visit to a school where the majority of pupils and staff are Muslim, but you might well do so once the relationship of confidence and trust has been developed.

Similarly, having someone act the part of Jesus would be an offence to many Muslims. One solution is always to play the part of Jesus yourself if you are acting out the Bible story. This has been acceptable in multifaith schools we have visited.

Working in multifaith contexts raises whole sets of issues which aren't around in other schools. It's an exciting area of work with many great opportunities and the chance to work with some wonderful pupils and dedicated staff. However, it's not all plain sailing and we need to go in with our eyes open and an awareness of the cultures we are encountering. Our hope and prayer is that this book will help you to lead Christian collective worship in a new, exciting and appropriate way, whatever the context.