Preparing to Celebrate the Word – a brief guide

Information for teachers

There are many forms of prayer for children to experience as they learn how to draw closer to God. Celebrating the Word allows us all to focus on scripture and celebrate the ways in which God invites us to listen to Him. Giving children time to reflect on what they have heard helps them gradually develop a deeper understanding of God's Word, His story and His message to us. Below are some ideas for planning and evaluating a Celebration of the Word, followed by guidance when using a four-part structure.

Planning

- Children can be taught how to plan a Celebration of the Word according to their understanding, experience, and stage of development. Many schools or dioceses have a progression document which outlines the skills children need to be able to plan, prepare and then lead a Celebration of the Word. Initially, planning would be modelled by an adult. Then, with support and guidance, children would make choices from a limited set of options before being able to plan each stage of a Celebration of the Word with increasing confidence over time.
- The theme of the Celebration of the Word will generally reflect the season of the church's liturgical calendar. However, there may be exceptions within the school's year, e.g. a Reception Class welcome or a celebration for Y6 Leavers.
- The Mission Together website has a bank of free resources to download for feasts and seasons throughout the year. Find them on our Mission Together website here:

Feast days	Advent and Christmas	Lent	Holy Week & Easter	Ascension and Pentecost	Our Lady and the Rosary

- You can also find a 'Celebration of the Word Pupil Planner' and 'Write your own prayer' resource with many other prayer resources, on our Mission Together website here.

Participation

- The Church asks for 'full, conscious and active' participation but this does not mean everyone should 'have a job'. Fostering good liturgical participation by engaging hearts and minds, both internally and externally, requires careful and thoughtful preparation and teaching.
- Children can participate simply by being present. Their skills of being able to listen attentively, join in with prayer responses, keep a sacred silence, show reverence whilst being open to God, will develop over time.

- Opportunities to encourage engagement may also include other physical actions and gestures such as lighting a candle, sharing a sign of peace, genuflecting or joining in with sung actions.
- A note on children of other faiths Children of other faiths cannot be compelled to take part in Catholic prayers. They may instead be invited to remain present and reflective, while learning how to live out their own faith with integrity. Opportunities for reflection - including moments to think about the day, express sorrow, or give thanks - can help children of other faiths engage meaningfully. *(See Prayer and Liturgy Directory p23).*

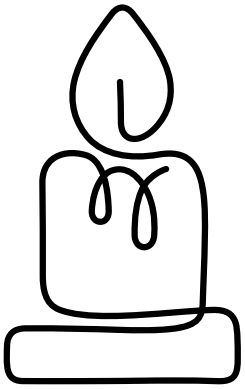
Evaluation

- When teaching children how to plan, participate in, and lead Celebration of the Word, it is helpful to engage them in discussions afterwards, reflecting on how the prayer time went and considering what they might do differently next time. Ask them what went well and what might they change.
- If parents and visitors are present during the Celebration of the Word, invite their responses too by asking them directly or by inviting them to write a comment on a sticky note.

THE FOUR-PART STRUCTURE

Gather

- Prepare an appropriate prayer space which sets the scene for a Celebration of the Word. Try to ensure the space is made special, particularly if it is used for other activities such as PE or dinner time.
- A prayer focus is an ideal way to create this special space and to enshrine the bible or scripture passage. If a printed version of the scripture passage is to be used, mounting it on card and adding an image (a piece of art or a child's illustration) would help children recognise its importance.
- Use cloths to reflect the liturgical season: green for Ordinary Time, purple for Advent and Lent, white for feast days. Red to commemorate martyrs and at Pentecost.
- Light a candle as a sign to remember that Jesus is the light of the world, and as a way to show that we offer our prayers to God. Add a cross or crucifix. Try to maintain a clear focus on the bible without cluttering the prayer space.
- Establish clear routines for entering the sacred space, either using silence, music, or an appropriate hymn. Special items could be brought forward in a procession, for example, each class could bring a lit candle, a piece of art or a prayer to add to a basket.



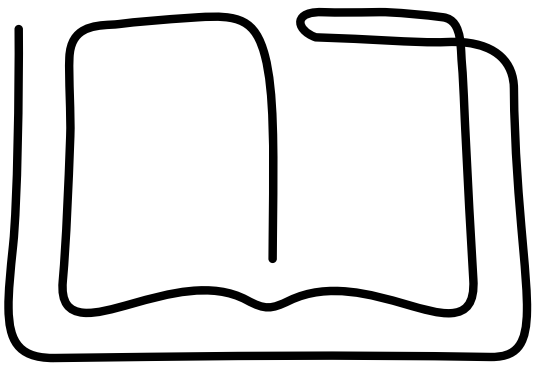
- Begin with the Sign of the Cross, any introductory words to introduce the theme, and an opening prayer.

Listen

- The main focus of a Celebration of the Word is to listen to a passage of scripture following the church's calendar. If appropriate for the children, use the readings of the day. Guidance in the Prayer and Liturgy Directory explains how scripture can be adapted for young children.
- Teach the children how to greet or respond to scripture using these set phrases, and then to listen attentively.

Introducing scripture that is not a Gospel.	Response to a reading that is not a Gospel.	Gospel Acclamation: Greeting the Gospel	Gospel Acclamation: Greeting the Gospel during Lent.	Welcoming the Gospel	Responding to the Gospel
A reading from …	The word of the Lord.	Spoken, or preferably, a sung **Alleluia**	e.g. Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory! or Glory and praise to you, O Christ!	A reading from the Holy Gospel according to *N.*	The Gospel of the Lord.
No response is made.	**Thanks be to God.**			**Glory to you, O Lord.** *Draw three small crosses on head, lips and heart.*	**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

- After hearing God's Word, an adult leader can offer a short reflection to help children gain a deeper understanding of what they have heard. It is important to consider how many words are used during a Celebration of the Word and to ensure that children do not become overwhelmed. Repeating the main theme is especially helpful for young children, as it helps them focus on the scripture and understand how to apply Jesus' teachings to their own lives.



Respond

- We respond to the scripture we have just heard through prayer. Pope Francis said that 'In prayer one opens one's heart', reminding us of the importance of providing children with the opportunity to pray aloud in their own words.
- Children can prepare prayers in advance using our downloadable resource 'Writing My Own Prayer' as a guide.
- Written prayers can follow the pattern found during Mass, e.g., for the Church, the world, those in need, the local community.
- Alternatively, the adult leader can invite impromptu prayers, guiding the children by providing an introduction and example, e.g. *'Today in our prayer time we have been thinking about gratitude. Now let's tell God about the things we are grateful for. Dear God, today I am grateful for.'*
- Opportunities to make impromptu prayers are particularly effective in smaller groups such as when a single class gathers to Celebrate the Word.
- For larger Celebrations of the Word with the whole school community, parents and parishioners, creative responses may also be included during the response to the Word. This might be a dance, a drama or a song, or it may include carrying out an action like bringing forward prayer posters, Harvest contributions or items to create a shared display. Remember that creative responses such as dances or dramas are presented here as prayers rather than performances and it may be more appropriate to keep the round of applause until the very end of the Celebration of the Word.
- Bring your prayer time to a close with a prayer everybody can say together such as the Our Father, the Hail Mary or the Mission Together Prayer. For these and other prayers, visit Mission Together Prayer Resources.

Mission

- The origin of the word 'mission' means to be sent out. Briefly share the theme again with all gathered and decide how God's love can be taken into the world by our words and actions. For example, during Eastertide how can we bring resurrection joy to others; during Lent how will we say an extra prayer every day; during Mission Month how can we support missionaries around the world with our prayers and fundraising.
- The end of the Celebration of the Word should include the Sign of the Cross and may include an appropriate hymn. Find a selection of songs and hymns for children here: Sing with Mission Together.

Other useful links:
Liturgy Office | Homepage
Liturgy Office | Music Resources
Prayer and Liturgy Directory