

WORSHIP IDEAS FOR AN EASTER COMMUNION SERVICE **(Following the Structure of Common Worship, Order One)**

PLEASE NOTE: it is not suggested that you try everything on the list below in the same service – there may be some queasiness from eating too many eggs, for one thing – or even that you try one idea from each section. A service can become too busy with ‘special’ elements and the liturgy can be swamped. Aim for a balance – and save some ideas for future years!

The symbolism in the outlined suggestions may seem obvious to those devising a service, but may not always be so to the congregation – especially if it contains ‘major festival only’ worshippers. It may therefore be necessary to preface some of the actions with a brief explanation. I emphasise the ‘brief’ as the power of symbols can be killed by too much explanation – especially if the explanation is 5 times as long as the symbolic moment!

GENERAL POINTS

- Is it possible to hold an outdoor dawn service at or near your church? To celebrate the risen Christ as the sun turns night to day is a dramatic experience. And followed by a shared breakfast it is a wonderful community celebration. If geography is against you where you are, how about a coach trip out to somewhere more suitable?
- If an actual sunrise service is not a possibility, why not use a large gold paper covered cardboard sun during your service? Easter is rich with the possibilities for symbols of all kinds – even if they are just ‘there’ in church they will make a more visually stimulating environment for the children, but if they can be moved and used at an appropriate point in the service, all the better. There is much symbolic meaning in the use of different and contrasting kinds of cross – a ‘golden’, ‘budded’ or other very elaborate cross beside a rough wooden cross; true crucifix (with figure of Jesus) put in juxtaposition to a ‘resurrection’ cross with no figure; juxtaposed crosses draped with purple and white stoles. Other symbolic contrasts are possible, eg a large broken loaf and glass pitcher of wine contrasted with a large stone and display of flowers; the crown of thorns and the crown of a king. Other traditional symbols are the paschal candle, and the ‘lamb and flag’.

HOLY COMMUNION STRUCTURE (CW Order One)

¶ THE GATHERING

- If you have a narthex which can be darkened, gather there in the dark for preparatory prayer(s). At the appropriate moment, with a clamour of trumpets, air horns, cymbals, bells etc, burst open the doors and enter a brightly lit church.
- Process the lit paschal candle into the church and dip the bottom into the font to emphasise the link between Jesus's rising and the rising of the baptised to new life.

The Greeting

- The word 'Alleluia' will be heard for the first time for many weeks: it can be marked, here and throughout the service with horns etc (as above), and the waving of 'Alleluia' flags. Children, in groups of 8, could have cards with each letter of 'Alleluia' brightly decorated on them – they could jump up and form the word whenever it is said.

Prayer of Preparation

- Process in some large, plain white banners.
- Stretch two or three long strips of white cloth across the church, held by children at either end. The children raise and lower the ends rhythmically, causing a ripple effect along the strips.
- Drape white cloth gracefully over appropriate parts of the church furniture.

Prayers of Penitence

- If you are using the Easter Day Invitation to Confession: 'Christ our passover lamb has been sacrificed for us' (Common Worship p316) a suitable cross could be brought to stand amongst the people in the nave.
- During a silence for reflection, the congregation could taste the bitterness of lemon juice by dipping a short piece of 'bread stick' into a bowl of juice.
- When absolution is pronounced, chocolate eggs could be eaten – particularly if lemon juice has been used for the confession.

- If the font has been filled, the water could be used for asperges (sprinkling the congregation) at the absolution.
- When they receive absolution, the congregation could be asked to stand and stretch to experience being alive and focus on the new life offered through the resurrection and also through forgiveness of sins.
- The Easter story is one of sadness turned to happiness. The children could be supplied with 'happy' and 'sad' masks, or faces on paper plates, or a pair of curved card lips which can be turned up or down. They could hold up 'sad' during the confession, and 'happy' at absolution.

Gloria in Excelsis

- Like the word 'Alleluia', the Gloria may well not have been heard for many weeks, and its reappearance could be marked by having a sung Gloria. Perhaps the children could have practised this and could lead the congregation.
- During the Gloria, decorations could be hung on a bare tree: decorated eggs or egg shapes, flowers, leaves, or a mixture of these – all carrying messages of thanksgiving for Jesus's resurrection.

The Collect

- The Collect for Easter Day is a celebration of future hope. Foil wrapped chocolate eggs could be eaten here, and the foil moulded into an image of hope. Adults could discuss ideas with children.
- The Collect completes the Preparation and at this point the Common Worship rubric (p171) says *The president introduces a period of silent prayer* In the silence the congregation could be asked to think about their experiences of 'new beginnings' eg starting a new book, making up after an argument, waking from a nightmare.
- The congregation could think of examples of surprises that have 'brightened up their lives' and share them with their neighbours.
- The silence could be used to sense the signs of spring (climatic and geographic conditions permitting!) eg *hearing* the birds outside, *smelling* the flowers in church, *seeing* the bright decorations and the sun through the windows.

¶ **THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

Readings

- The Easter Gospel Acclamation makes use of 'Alleluias' which could be sung and marked with flags or banners.
- The light of the paschal candle is a symbol of the risen life of Christ, so any use of candles re-emphasises this. If it is not your custom to have a gospel procession with acolytes and candles, you could consider it as a special feature of this festival.
- The 'sad' and 'happy' masks etc used in the confession (see above) could be held up at appropriate times in the Gospel narrative – 'sad' as the women go to the tomb; 'happy' at the realisation of the resurrection.
- As a response to the Gospel – perhaps during the psalm – the children could decorate a bare cross with flowers.
- Another appropriate response might be to process an Easter Garden (or Gardens) to the altar, where it/they can be seen at the communion. There are a number of variants on the Easter Garden theme: eg a single garden made in a portable tray; a 'dead' garden made with bare twigs and dead leaves contrasted with a 'live' garden – perhaps seeds which will germinate during Lent could have been planted in the shape of a cross; individual 'gardens' which each child makes (perhaps during the service) in a margarine tub.

Sermon

An activity might replace or form part of the sermon. Here are some suggestions:

- Process around the outside of the church looking for the body of Jesus. End at the church door, which is closed. Knock on the door of the church and demand the body. A 'plant' inside shouts that 'He is risen!'
- Create a labyrinth with symbols relevant to Holy Week: as the congregation make their way through it, they draw ever nearer the centre where the open tomb is represented.
- The story of Easter morning can be dramatised in many ways: to avoid elaborate props, or the need to represent the risen Christ, you could stage an interview between the Jerusalem Broadcasting Corporation, and the first resurrection witnesses.

- An egg hunt could take place around the church. Each egg could have a part of the story attached. Adults could accompany the children on their hunt and help them sequence and read out the snippets they have found before eating the eggs.
- A mime/dance sequence could be produced on the theme of the 'death and resurrection' in the life cycle of growing plants.
- An egg rolling race – rolling eggs is a traditional commemoration of the rolling away of the stone.
- Alternatively a large imitation boulder could be rolled down the nave – perhaps away from the altar.
- Themed flower arrangements illustrating the events of Holy Week could be used as stations round the church.
- Alternatively, very large Easter cards with relevant illustrations could have been made by the children and displayed round the church as stations.
- The congregation could be asked to talk to their neighbours about their feelings now that spring is here, and what they can now look forward to as summer is on the way.

The Creed

- Easter is a traditional time for baptism, or the renewal of baptism vows. If either of these options is taking place, the creed can be said in the responsorial form of the baptism service. If vows are being renewed, certificates can be brought to church and candles re-lit by those who still have them (or substitutes provided for those who haven't). The congregation could sprinkle or sign themselves with water from the font.

NB The renewal of vows is not to be taken lightly – Common Worship makes clear (see pp149-152) that it should take place 'only when there has been due notice and proper preparation'. (Perhaps the preparation could be part of a Lent course ...)

- If the form of statement of faith being used contains reference to the dying and rising of Jesus, then the dipping of the bottom of paschal candle into the font (see above) might take place here.
- Another way of marking dying and rising might be for the children to have made collapsible butterflies which fit inside painted toilet roll middles to represent the chrysalis: the chrysalis is held up for death, and the butterfly pulled out for the rising.

Prayers of Intercession

- Subjects for prayer could be written on cards representing the stone (things which we want 'rolled away') or flowers (things we say thank you for) and the congregation could bring and place them around the Easter Garden.
- An alternative use of the 'egg hunt' could be to have names of countries on the hidden eggs and these could be shouted out and prayed for as they are found: the risen Christ is the Christ of all the world.
- One or more large card representations of the lit paschal candle could be passed round the congregation (passing the actual candle when lit might be hazardous!) and as each member receives it, they pray silently for some person or situation they want to bring into the light of the risen Christ.
- The congregation could be invited into a period of stillness and then asked to imagine an angel coming to them with a message from Jesus as the messenger in Mark 16 brings the news that the disciples should go and seek Jesus in Galilee, not in the grave.
- Barbed wire could be used to turn the paschal candle into an Amnesty International style symbol, and prayers could be offered for those suffering persecution for their faith in the risen Lord. (Take care with the barbed wire!)
- Everyone could be supplied with a bulb and invited to plant it as a 'seed of hope' whilst giving thanks for the hope the resurrection brings.

¶ THE LITURGY OF THE SACRAMENT

The Peace

- Gifts could be exchanged. The adults could be supplied with small wrapped chocolate eggs and asked to share the peace and an egg with children; the children could do likewise with the adults, using daffodils (or perhaps the adults would like eggs too!)

Preparation of the Table Taking of the Bread and Wine

- The traditional symbols of Holy Week could be brought one after the other to the altar: crown of thorns, whip, dice, sponge, nails, pieces of silver, culminating with the bread and wine. As each symbol is brought to the altar, suitable words are said along the lines of: 'I/we bring to remind us of Help us to'. When the bread and wine are brought Prayer 8 from the Common Worship 'Prayers at the Preparation of the Table' (p292) could be used.

Eucharistic Prayer

- The 'Eucharistic preface' for Easter Day and the 'mystery of faith' could be illustrated with the butterflies, or use of 'He is Risen' flags/banners.

The Lord's Prayer

- Even if it is not your tradition to sing the Lord's Prayer, it might be appropriate to do so on this very special occasion. Perhaps a new setting could have been developed with the children which they could lead.

Giving of Communion

- Those children who receive a blessing, could be given a small card with a special Easter blessing in addition to their normal blessing. This might be appropriate for all children present – even those who receive communion. Perhaps these cards could be given from a basket by a server as the children are returning from the altar.

Prayer after Communion

- The rubric (Common Worship p182) states *Silence is kept*. During this silence, images of 'Christ Triumphant' could be projected - with suitable accompanying music, if we interpret 'silence' as an absence of words!

¶ THE DISMISSAL

- It is an old tradition to decorate the graves in the churchyard for Easter morning (see 'Kilvert's Diary') as a reminder that in the light of Easter, death for the Christian is not an end but a new beginning. Whether or not decorating the graves is possible, the final dismissal could take place in the graveyard.

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Most of the ideas in this pack have been taken from the following publications, all of which are available for loan from the Resource Centre at the Board of Education, Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester, M3 2GH

TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	YEAR
'Bright Ideas – Festivals'	Jill Bennett & Archie Millar	Scholastic	1988
'Christian Festivals for Schools'		Rutherford House	1996
'Festive Allsorts'	Nicola Currie	NS/CHP	1994
'Together for Festivals' (Together with Children)	ed. Pam Macnaughton & Hamish Bruce	NS/CHP	1997
'Together for Festivals'		Church Information Office	1975
'Together for Festivals 2'		CHP	1987
'The Lion Easter Book'	Mary Batchelor	Lion	1987
'Teaching About Easter'	Brenda Lealman & Dan McEwan	CEM	1982
'A Church for All Ages'	Peter Graystone & Eileen Turner	SU	1993
'Celebrating Lent & Easter'	Donald Hilton	NCEC	1987
'Worship Through the Christian Year' Years A,B and C	Diana Murrie & Hamish Bruce	NS/CHP	2000
'God's Word for Children'	Susan Sayers	Kevin Mayhaw	1989
'Including Young People'	Susan Sayers	Kevin Mayhaw	1996
'Welcome the Word'	Joan Brown SND	Geoffrey Chapman	1989
'The Word for All God's Family'	Leslie J Francis & Marian Carter	Gracewing	1996
'Celebrations of the Word for Children'	Bernice Stadler	Twenty Third Publications	1987
'Partners in Learning'	ed. Clare Amos	Methodist Church/NCEC	1997
'Living Stones'	Susan Sayers	Kevin Mayhaw	1997
'Travelling Together'	Jill Fuller	NCEC	1993
'Assemblies for Primary Schools – Spring Term'	Margaret Cooling	RMEP	1990
'Multi-sensory Prayer'	Sue Wallace	SU	2000