



# WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

A TOOLKIT FOR RURAL CHURCHES



**Germinate**  
*Arthur Rank Centre*



# INTRODUCTION

A minister received a phone call from one of her church members: there was no one available to lead their worship the following Sunday so they wondered if it would be alright if they asked people to pick their favourite hymn and talk about why it was special to them. 'Absolutely', the minister replied.

Visiting the church the following week, the minister was told how much they had enjoyed the service the previous week: 'We didn't know that Elsie thought this and Jack thought that. It was a great time of sharing, can we do it again?'

The expectation for most church congregations is that they meet regularly to share a service of worship together. The content may vary, but there will be opportunities to pray together, sing if you enjoy that, read the Bible and reflect on what God may be saying. There will also be opportunities for fellowship.

“

*Conversation Starter*

## WHAT DOES 'WORSHIP' MEAN TO YOU?

What are the parts of a service that mean the most to you? Is it the prayers, the music or reading the Bible? Be honest and listen to others as they share what is meaningful for them.

How do you feel about the idea of you and other in your church leading your own worship on some occasions?

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# WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

Worship is at the heart of all that we are as Christians, and many rural Christians value worshipping together in their own communities. Coming together to worship God helps us to put things in their right perspective, to acknowledge God at the centre of our lives, and to bring the life of our community into our worship. After all, 'worship, prayer and the celebration of the sacraments offered faithfully and lovingly in the heart of the community enriches everyone' (Presence, Methodist Church, 2004).

## WORSHIP IN THE BIBLE

The Old Testament has references to seasonal services (Exodus 34:22-23) and Passover (Leviticus 23:4). Of course, the Sabbath was to be kept as a day for God (Exodus 20:8-11). Psalms were part of worship in the Temple and later the synagogue. Some of them, such as Psalms 8 and 19, link us with the creation as it praises God; others, like Psalm 23, talk about our relationship with God.

In the New Testament, Revelation 5:7-14 gives us a picture of the whole created order worshipping God. You may notice in verse 8 a reference to the prayers of God's people, reminding us that we too join in this eternal circle of worship.



## EXPLORING THE PSALMS

Many of the psalms we find in the Bible were written for different worship occasions. They cover a range of emotions from joy and praise to fear and anger.

**Read Psalms 117 and 95.**

What do these psalms say to you about worship?  
Can you share your favourite psalm, saying why you like it?

## JESUS AND WORSHIP

In the Gospels we see that people are amazed by Jesus and sometimes fall on their knees at his feet, perhaps as a sign of worship.

**Read Matthew 28:16-20.**

Why do you think the disciples worshipped at this point?

What might this say to us?

**Read John 4:19-24.**

In John's Gospel Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at a well. They talk about many things, including worship.

What do you think it means to worship in spirit and in truth?

## WORSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP

Worshipping together also helps us to grow as disciples: 'it is in worship that disciples are formed and transformed' (Disciples Together, SCM Press, 2014). The fellowship and sense of community that belonging to church can give is also important. In rural communities, where loneliness and isolation can be an issue, coming together regularly as the church can make a difference.

## WORSHIP IN OUR OWN COMMUNITIES

Having a service at a regular time each week can make it easier for new people to join in. However, we must acknowledge that across all denominations there are less people, lay or ordained, trained to lead worship. Therefore, if we want to continue to worship regularly in our communities we will need to embrace different ways of doing things. All denominations have guidelines about leading worship which appear later in this resource. However, this doesn't mean that congregations cannot organise their own worship on occasions. Of course, this will need to be done in consultation with your church leader.

Being involved in locally led worship can be a really positive experience as the story we began with shows. This resource will help you think about worship and how you can share in it together.



# PLANNING YOUR SERVICE

When you're planning your service don't forget to think carefully about how to introduce each item; things we so often take for granted – like when to stand up and sit down, when to refer to a service book or sheet – can be completely alien to visitors or less regular attendees. Clear explanations are a really important part of our welcome!

## A SERVICE OUTLINE

This is an outline you could use for a service but don't feel bound by it: be creative!



<b>Welcome</b>	Welcome everyone and make sure they are comfortable.
<b>Opening hymn or song</b>	Choose something you think most people will know.
<b>Prayer</b>	A short prayer that focuses on God – the Lord's Prayer would work well.
<b>Hymn or song</b>	Alternatively, you could listen to some music.
<b>Read a Bible passage</b>	Does your church have a pattern of readings such as the Revised Common Lectionary?
<b>Reflect on the Bible passage</b>	Share some thoughts on the passage (see suggestions below).
<b>Praying for others</b>	Consider focusing on your community (see suggestions below).
<b>Hymn or song to finish with</b>	Choose something you think most people will know.
<b>Share the grace together</b>	The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all now and evermore. Amen.

## MUSIC AND SINGING

Singing together is not compulsory! If you do want to sing, and you have a pianist or organist available, pick hymns that you are all comfortable with. If you don't want to sing, why not listen to some music or use a CD of hymns? Try:

No organist no problem CDs and DVDs for all kinds of worship

[kevinmayhew.com/cds-dvds/ipod-collections/no-organist-no-problem.html](http://kevinmayhew.com/cds-dvds/ipod-collections/no-organist-no-problem.html)

Taize CDs

Available from Christian bookshops or from [shop.taize.fr/cds.html](http://shop.taize.fr/cds.html)

## SERMONS AND TEACHING

A sermon is not essential to worship, and in many denominations only those who are authorised may preach. However, there are many ways of sharing the word of God together. Many churches use a Lectionary which lists different readings for the year. Try:

- **Common Worship**  
[almanac.oremus.org/lectionary](http://almanac.oremus.org/lectionary)
- **Daily readings and prayers for the Church of England**  
[churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-daily-prayer](http://churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-daily-prayer)
- **A word in time Bible Study from the Methodist Church**  
[methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-bible/a-word-in-time/](http://methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-bible/a-word-in-time/)
- **Daily Devotions from the URC**  
[devotions.urc.org.uk/](http://devotions.urc.org.uk/)

Some simple questions can be a great way of starting a conversation about the passage you've read. Ask 'What you did you hear as this passage was read today?'

If the reading is from one of the New Testament letters, think about the churches the letter was written to and write a reply.

Listen to a parable and try and write it for today.

Alternatively, if talking about a Bible passage feels a little intimidating, why not begin by picking a favourite hymn to discuss?

## PRAYING TOGETHER

Opening prayers help us to focus on God at the beginning of our worship.

- We need to praise God; the psalms can help here or you could just look out of the window at the beauty of creation.
- Does your church community have things to say thank you for?
- It can be good to include some silence to say sorry to God as well.
- There are many good prayer books you can use but why not try writing something yourself?

Remember there is no one right way to talk to God!

Prayers for others enable us to bring our concerns, and those of our communities, to God in prayer.

- This Time Tomorrow: ask people what they will be doing at this time tomorrow and pray for them.
- Do you have a prayer box or board that people can leave prayers on?
- Perhaps there are people you know that need prayer. Be careful to respect their privacy and don't use names publicly without permission; it may be more appropriate to have a time of silence for people to pray for friends and family that are struggling.
- If your community has a calendar, remember to pray for the events and groups in that.
- Look wider than your community as well: what has been in the news headlines this week?

## SEASONAL WORSHIP AND CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS

Seasons and festivals offer great opportunities to invite the wider community to join you in worship. Consider how you might use Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter, plus agricultural festivals like Plough Sunday, Rogation and Harvest, as opportunities to try new things!

Visit the Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre website ([germinate.net](http://germinate.net)) for suggestions and ideas.

## PRACTICALITIES

If you are leading worship together you may want to take the opportunity to do things a little differently.

- If your church has chairs, try arranging them in a circle rather than rows. Conversely, if your church has pews, could you try sitting in a different part of the building?
- Why not create a different focal point at the front or in the middle using a picture or a candle?
- Your service doesn't have to be long. With a small group, 30 minutes is often ample; make sure there's also time to get together afterwards to chat over good quality refreshments. If your building doesn't have kitchen facilities could someone bring a flask from home?



# SOME GUIDANCE FROM DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

Each denomination has guidance for churches leading their own worship. If you are unsure about how this information relates to your church community, please contact your own denomination directly.

## BAPTISTS TOGETHER

[baptist.org.uk](http://baptist.org.uk)

Baptist churches are autonomous in their governance, so it is for each local congregation to consider their church rules and trust documents, and then decide what form the services take and who can lead or participate in them.

Resources, training and support are available to churches from their Regional Minister and their Association Office. Links to these can be found on the national website above.

## CHURCH OF ENGLAND

[churchofengland.org/more/diocesan-resources/ministry/developing-lay-ministries](http://churchofengland.org/more/diocesan-resources/ministry/developing-lay-ministries)

The Church of England is keen to encourage the lay leadership of worship where appropriate. The form of worship should be agreed by the incumbent of the parish beforehand and a recognised minister under their supervision should lead it.

Selection, recognition and training of the minister is required, and may be delivered locally. It might include an annual celebration service and a regular local review for renewal of recognition. Responsibility for safeguarding training and checks lies with the PCC or other local responsible body for those leading worship.

## METHODIST CHURCH

[methodist.org.uk](http://methodist.org.uk)

'A service described on the preaching plan by the words "Local Arrangements" or any similar expression shall be arranged by church stewards and led by persons from the local congregation and shall not normally include a preaching element.' (Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church S.O. 569)

## UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

[urc.org.uk](http://urc.org.uk)

The URC allows a congregation to make its own arrangements for worship. However, ongoing responsibility for the oversight of worship is a function of the Elders' Meeting or its equivalent.

There are two qualifications around that freedom:

- Anyone leading worship regularly would be strongly encouraged to take some structured training for this task, and most of the synods would have a package that would be relevant to this.
- For anyone other than a minister of word and sacraments to preside at sacramental worship (either baptism or communion), there must be explicit synod authorisation. Authorisation may be given for one service or in certain circumstances for several years, but one may not proceed without it.



## KEEPING OUR CHILDREN SAFE

Safeguarding falls outside of the expertise of Germinate so it is not our place to offer specific or detailed guidance on how to go about developing appropriate policies and procedures in your local church. However, expert advice is available both from specialist organisations and from denominational safeguarding teams who can help and support in you in the process of developing your own policies.

It is important to remember that in legal terms a young person remains a child until their eighteenth birthday. Therefore, in the context of safeguarding you need to ensure that your policies and procedures cover those up to and including the age of seventeen.

For a wide variety of help and advice, we suggest you make contact with the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS). CCPAS is the only independent Christian charity providing professional advice, training, support and resources in all areas of safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm. Contact them by phoning 0303 003 1111 or visit their website, [ccpas.co.uk](http://ccpas.co.uk).

For links to safeguarding information from the mainstream UK denominations, please visit our website ([germinate.net/safeguarding](http://germinate.net/safeguarding)).



# RESOURCES

## **Barnabas in Churches** ([barnabasinchurches.org.uk](http://barnabasinchurches.org.uk))

A free website with ideas for bringing the Bible to life. Suitable for children and families but interesting for anyone.

## **Family Friendly Church Ideas** ([ffctideas.org.uk](http://ffctideas.org.uk))

Web-based resource for family friendly worship; there is a fee for this resource

## **Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre** ([germinate.net](http://germinate.net))

Website with resources for seasonal worship

## **Iona Community** ([ionabooks.com](http://ionabooks.com))

Worship resources, books, downloads, CDs etc.

## **Roots** ([rootsontheweb.com](http://rootsontheweb.com))

A magazine and website that produces resources linked to the lectionary both for adults and children; there is a fee for this resource

## **The Text This Week** ([textweek.com](http://textweek.com))

Linked to the lectionary. Whilst aimed at preachers, it has an art and film index which may be helpful.

## MUSIC

### **No organist no problem** ([kevinmayhew.com/cds-dvds/ipod-collections/no-organist-no-problem.html](http://kevinmayhew.com/cds-dvds/ipod-collections/no-organist-no-problem.html))

CDs and DVDs for all kinds of worship

### **Taize** ([shop.taize.fr/cds.html](http://shop.taize.fr/cds.html))

CDs available from Christian bookshops or online

## FURTHER READING

Roger Walton, **Disciples Together: Discipleship Formation and Small Groups**, (SCM Press, 2014)

**Presence: A workbook to help promote and sustain an Effective Christian Presence in Villages** (Methodist Church, 2004)

This resource has been produced by Revd Elizabeth Clark, National Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches, and Revd Dr Mark Betson, National Rural Officer for the Church of England.



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