

# Worship in **Primary Schools**

Worship can be a powerful and meaningful experience for primary school children, but it should be tailored to match the students' age and stage. This guide will look at the need of this age group and provide some ideas for organising worship.



## Ages and Stages

Primary worship can be complicated to a certain degree by the range in ages and stages of students. A junior primary student is quite different in many ways from a Year 6 about to move on to secondary school. While this may seem overwhelming, there are ways to cater to the range in a way that makes worship relevant to all.

### Developing faith in the early years

From the earliest years, children have experiences of awe and wonder. It seems that all children are born with a sense of the incomprehensible, the holy – a sense of God.

Impressions of God are generally positive – a fun, playful God or a God that may take on a magical or superhero quality. Three- to seven-year-old children readily imagine unusual creatures like monsters and dragons, so thinking of God as a superhero is not unusual. Believing in miracles presents no problem to them.

One of the most important spiritual needs of young children is the freedom to create and find spiritual images of God, heaven, and death that express their feelings and understandings. They also need to create and participate in meaningful practices

and rituals, like table prayers, that acknowledge that God is active in the ordinary events of life.

Students love stories that clearly define good and evil, which is why Bible stories (and fairy tales) are so well loved. These stories help them recognise feelings and behaviours that threaten and bother them and help them to identify with the triumph of good over evil.

### The relational world of pre-adolescents

As students move through primary school, they become more independent and start to question what they have been taught and think more deeply about spiritual matters.

While a middle primary school student may embrace increasing responsibilities in planning and presenting worship, they may also struggle at times with managing realistic expectations of what they can achieve and may suddenly become quite self-conscious.

As students move at differing points into early adolescence, they begin to consider their personal identity, including a spiritual identity.

They may even experiment with a range of different identities – trying them on for size and then discarding the ones that don't work for them.

Pre-adolescents often rely on peers to help them in this struggle. They may be very tuned in to the expectations and judgments of the group and happy to adopt the group ideology rather than have a belief of their own. They may go along with the pack, even when it goes against a previously held position.

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”

MATTHEW 19:14

## Worshipping in Primary schools

In many ways, Primary school is an ideal time for school worship, when students are usually quite enthusiastic about participating in worship and often enjoy being part of planning or leading worship. They respond well to creative ideas and still look to their teacher for guidance and encouragement.

That said, there is a huge difference between a 5-year-old and an 11- or 12-year-old. While whole school worship is totally possible and desirable, it might be worth considering having a pattern in your worship plan that allows for year-level or age band worship some weeks and whole school worship on other weeks. For example, Week 1 whole school worship, Week 2 Junior Primary worship in the chapel and year-level worship in classrooms for Years 3–6, Week 3 whole school worship, Week 4, Upper Primary worship in the chapel and year-level worship in classrooms for Years F–2, and so on.

Having a differentiated approach like this could provide opportunities for more age-appropriate content in worship – a chance to go deeper for older children or have more fun, interactive songs or videos for younger children, for example.



### WEEK 1



**Whole school  
worship**

### WEEK 2



**Junior Primary  
worship in chapel**

**Upper Primary worship  
in classrooms**

### WEEK 3



**Whole school  
worship**

### WEEK 4



**Upper Primary  
worship in chapel**

**Junior Primary  
worship in classrooms**

# Worship, Devotions and the Christian Studies Curriculum Framework

While the content of the CSCF may complement and inform worship and devotions, it is important for the spiritual well-being of staff and students that worship is the primary purpose of the service and devotional time. Worship and devotions are stand-alone activities and should be timetabled separately from Christian Studies. A challenge in Primary schools is the vast quantity of curriculum to cover in a whole range of subjects, including Christian Studies.

There are two different schools of thought about whether to integrate worship with Christian Studies:

- Those who support the integration of Christian Studies with worship see the advantages for teachers in learning material in CS lessons which will create the content for worship, especially if it is their class's turn to lead. It may allow students to dig more deeply into the text for the week and to express their faith learning in the worship setting.
- On the other hand, it can be argued that worship is different from academic learning. When staff and students come to worship, it should be a sanctuary time, free from the pressures of marking and assessment. The temptation to make worship a "class show" where every student must present their work so they can be judged detracts from the purpose of worship.



Whichever choice schools make, it is important for the spiritual well-being of staff and students that worship is the primary purpose of the service, and that the focus remains on what God is doing, not on human performance.

**CHRISTIAN STUDIES  
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

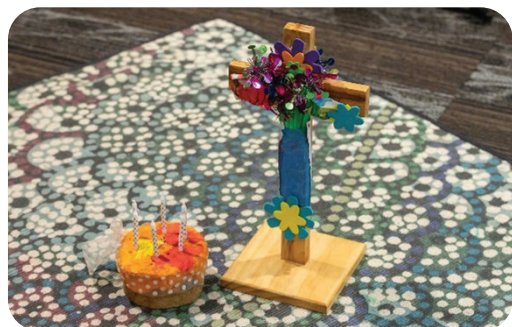


**PLANNING RESOURCES**



## Sacred spaces

Depending on your site, you may or may not have access to a dedicated worship space. If you are not on a campus with a chapel area, you might like to create a sacred space to signal that worship is a special time set apart, by setting up a small table with a cross, a Bible and candles. Involve the students in decorating the space as much as you can. Primary students may particularly enjoy creating displays to enhance specific services, especially for key festivals or seasons such as Easter and Christmas.



**IDEAS FOR SACRED SPACES**







## Rites and routine

Children respond well to clear and consistent routines, actions and patterns which signal that it is time to worship, time to pray, time to listen etc.

- You might like to ring a bell or sound a chime as a sign that it's time to come to worship.
- You could play a familiar, quiet piece of music as children enter.
- You could begin the worship by having students light the candles and gathering everyone together in God's name (the invocation). You could also have a procession to begin each worship time where students bring in a cross, candles and a Bible.
- When it is time to listen to the Bible readings, consider having a short phrase or prayer which leads into the reading to signal to children that they are hearing from God. For example,

“The act of becoming a Christian is the actual practicing of being Christian, over and over and over again”

IVY BECKWITH,  
2010, Formational  
Children's Ministry.

'Now we will hear from God.  
Let's listen carefully to the Bible story.'

'Let's pray before we hear the Bible story. Dear God,  
open our ears and our hearts to hear you today. Amen.'  
(You could include gestures to match the prayers).

A 'prayer of the day' style prayer may be appropriate for worship with older students.

- You might like to encourage the children and staff to bless each other at the end of the worship time. Use simple words and include a simple gesture like making a cross on each other's forehead or arm.

'God bless you today [name]';  
'Jesus loves you, [name]. Have a great day!'

You might also like to try a blessing which reflects the core point of the worship service. The Growing Faith at Home resources include a blessing matching the readings of the week, eg "May the Lord Jesus rule in your heart as King, and fill your life with his peace." (for Palm Sunday).



IDEAS FOR RITUALS & ROUTINES





## Involving students in worship

Primary students can complete many tasks in a worship service. Involving students is a good way to help them connect to the message of the day and to feel valued and accepted by the faith community.

Here are some ways to involve the students in your worship time:

- Ask children to perform the small rituals to start the worship time, like lighting the candles, participating in the processional or putting fresh flowers on the altar. It's a good idea to practice this beforehand and have a roster so everyone gets a turn.
- If you have children who are confident in front of the group, you could ask them to give the instructions:

'Now it's time to pray. Please bow your heads and fold your hands.'

- Involve students in telling the story/leading the Bible readings as they are able:
  - o Use their artwork to create a step-by-step illustrated version of the Bible story.
  - o Video them telling the story/reading the texts and play it during worship. Older students may like to film and edit this themselves.
  - o Have the children dress up and act out the story while you narrate.
  - o As soon as they are able to read well enough, encourage students to do the readings, whether from a Bible story book for the younger students or directly from the Bible for the middle and upper Primary students. If this is part of regular classroom devotions, it won't be so scary in worship.
- Consider involving students in the response to the Bible readings through drama, a special song that they have learnt, visual art displays etc.
- Action songs or songs they can dance to are a great way to get the wiggles out and to help reinforce the message. Older students who might feel too cool to do action songs may still enjoy teaching the moves to younger students.
- Students may like to lead or contribute petitions to the prayers.

### Resources for Primary Worship

PRAYER RESOURCES



MUSIC RESOURCES



BIBLE STORY RESOURCES



CREATIVE WORSHIP RESOURCES



PRIMARY SCHOOL WORSHIP EXAMPLES



# Sample **Worship Orders** (Primary)

You might like to use one of these orders to help you organise the worship and set up regular patterns for the children to follow.

## ORDER 1

### GATHERING

*As the children sit down, ask some students to come forward to 'light' the battery-operated candle and say:*

**'We light this candle to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world.'**

*Other children place the Bible story book on the altar and say:*

**'We put the Bible on the altar because it is the word of God.'**

Leader (L): Let's begin in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

**Children (C): Amen!**

### SONG

*Choose a praise/thanksgiving song related to the story of the week or one that the children know well. Model the actions.*

### PRAYER

*Consider a short prayer preparing children to listen to what God is saying in the readings.*

### THE WORD

L: Today we are going to hear a story from the Bible. [introduce the story in 1–2 sentences].

*The Bible story could be from a Bible story book, children's Bible, a video clip or a creative retelling of the story.*

### MESSAGE/RESPONSE

*[The school pastor, chaplain, pastor from a supporting congregation, principal/school leaders etc could provide a short message, or the class could prepare a response to the story/readings which lays out the main points of the text and connects it to everyday life. This can include creative responses of different kinds.]*

### PRAYER TIME

L: Now it's time to pray. When we pray, we are talking to God! He wants us to pray for each other, for people who need help and for ourselves.

### SONG

*You could add in another song here if time permits. Choose a song which connects to the theme for today.*

### BLESSING

L: Let's finish our worship by blessing each other. Turn to the person next to you and make a cross on their hand [or head or arm] and say this:

**God bless you (say their name)!**  
**Have a great day.**  
[or another blessing]

## ORDER 2

### GOD WELCOMES US

*This marks the official commencement of the service as God welcomes us to Worship Him. There are several options for wording:*

- **One option**  
God welcomes us here today. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.
- **Another option (spoken responsively)**  
In the name of the Father: **Who sent us Jesus.**  
In the name of the Son: **Who died for us.**  
And in the name of the Holy Spirit: **Who helps us to live as God's children. Amen.**

### CANDLES ARE LIT

*Wording to use:*

'The candles are lit to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world and that the Holy Spirit is among us in this time of Worship'

*We encourage you to light the candles before the Worship service begins or for those classes with older students you may organise for them to come forward and light them.*

### THEME HOOK

*Consider creative ways that you could reveal and explore this week's theme/story. You may like to plan a skit, film a video of your students, show a YouTube video, or find another engaging way to explore your theme/story. Feel free to be creative!*

### BIBLE READINGS

*Wording to use:*

'God speaks to us through His Word – the Bible'

*There are many different ways you can share Bible stories/verses that connect with your chosen biblical character. Some suggestions include:*

- Students reading directly from the Bible
- A dramatic reading with students reading different parts of the text
- A media presentation (e.g. video, Brick Testament photos, Lost Sheep series book)
- Acting out a Bible story (drama)
- A video (e.g. from the Jesus Story Book Bible collection)

### SONG

*Wording to use:*

'We sing to God'

*Suggestions:*

- Aim for two songs per worship.
- Not every song needs to have actions. Feel free to include 'singing only' songs, with lyrics on the screen, but no students leading the school with actions.
- If you do choose to have actions for songs, don't feel compelled to have all of your students on stage leading every song. Some options to consider:
  - o Ask a small group from your class to lead the actions.
  - o Ask a class who has already created actions for the song in a previous Worship to lead.
- A liturgical dance could take place of a song.
- Please provide clear instructions for students to stand or remain seated during songs.
  - o E.g. 'Please all stand as we sing our next song...'

### PRAYER

*Wording to use:*

'God listens to us as we pray'

*When preparing the prayers, you can choose what to pray for. Please keep in mind the following:*

- Global issues – asking and thanksgiving
- School issues – asking and thanksgiving
- Connections to the main message that you are sharing about the 'song of the week'
- You may choose to include the Lord's Prayer after the general prayers

### BLESSING

*Wording to use:*

'God blesses us as we go'

- The school pastor or chaplain could lead the blessing.