



# Worship in **Secondary Schools**

Worship can be a powerful and meaningful experience for secondary students, who are capable of deep spiritual response to what they are hearing. This guide will look at the needs of this age group and provide some ideas for organising worship.



## Ages and Stages of Faith Development

Young adolescents are involved in forming a 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.

The middle years of high school can seem like an eternity. Heightened emotions, sexual exploration and uncertainty, a feeling that school will never be over and a general restlessness with the status quo can see students seriously questioning their beliefs and rejecting their parents' teaching as they seek to establish their own identities. Although the middle teens can be challenging, they are often asking the right questions – who am I? Is there a plan for my life? Who really cares about me? Who can I trust?

As students move through secondary school and into the senior years, they face added pressures – assignments, exams, and the having to make decisions which will affect their future. Thinking about the future becomes more urgent and

more terrifying at the same time. With increasing maturity and the end of school in sight, many senior students become much easier to relate to and are capable of great insight and spiritual understanding.

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. Parents and teachers fear that the young person will become overly dependent on a pack with far different values from their own.

But despite appearances, teenagers do take note of our opinions, particularly the opinions we demonstrate by our actions as well as our words. Our beliefs and values are important to them. However, it's best to express these in open and respectful ways, and to listen to the young person's perspective as well.

**Young people tend to accept the faith system of the community around them, and are not particularly interested in analysing these beliefs. What faith system, if any, surrounds your students?**

Talk with your students about God's loving presence in all things (Romans 8:28). Speak about God as someone who loves and accepts them, someone who understands, is loyal and cares for them at times of crisis. God may be a close friend and 'knowable.'

“I think the true religious hunger of adolescence is to have a God who knows me and values me deeply and can be a kind of guarantor of my identity and worth in a world where I'm struggling to find who I can be.”

**JAMES FOWLER**

## Worshipping in secondary schools



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It can be challenging to engage young people in authentic, meaningful worship. These ideas may help:

- The application of Bible texts becomes increasingly important, as students need to hear how the passages they are hearing relate to their lives.
- Messages need to be Gospel-centred not moralistic life lessons.
- Worship can be a place where life's imperfections are acknowledged, and the community receives God's grace. It is worth teaching about restoration and reconciliation, and modelling confession and absolution. Opportunities for prayer and silent confession can be powerful and offer great comfort, although this should be on an invitational basis.
- Similarly, the psalms are full of the emotions that teenagers and adults often experience and struggle with, and they can be an impactful way of helping young people to realise that it is alright to feel those emotions and express them to God. It is worth considering some meditative practices from time to time such as listening to a psalm set to music or looking at images while the psalm is being read aloud.

## 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 could create a sacred space by setting up an altar area with a cross, a Bible and candles.

Consider changing displays to match the seasons of the church year or particular occasions which resonate with your learning community, such as Reconciliation Week or ANZAC Day.



**IDEAS FOR SACRED SPACES**





## Rites and routine

While students are often open to change and variety, having some familiar patterns/rites can also provide some much-needed structure and comfort.

This could include simple routine acts such as lighting candles or the use of common prayers such as The Lord's Prayer or other forms used in worship (liturgy) such as the invocation or final blessing.

You may wish to offer a variety of worship styles in a term, to keep worship fresh. For example, an interview chapel, music-focus worship, student-led chapel, an active chapel (incorporating drama, skit, movement). While the style of the worship time might look different, the core elements (invocation, hearing the Word of God, prayer and blessing) and the purpose of worship (listening to God and responding to him with prayer and thanksgiving) should remain the same.

IDEAS FOR RITUALS & ROUTINES



## Involving students in worship

Student involvement may seem difficult, but it is very important. 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. Ideally, staff would involve secondary students in planning.

Here are some ways to involve the students in worship:

- Ask students to perform the rituals to begin the worship time: light the candles, lead the invocation, or assist with opening prayers. It's a good idea to practice this beforehand.
- Involve young people in decorating the space. Engage them in selecting symbols and other decorative elements according to the church seasons or other special occasions.
- If students are confident speaking in front of a large group, you could ask them to lead different parts of the service, including Bible readings, writing and leading prayers.
- Consider involving students in the response to the Bible readings through drama, a song that they have learnt, visual art displays etc. Older students may want to deliver a message/response. It's advisable to check what they have planned and have them run it past the worship coordinator/chaplain/school pastor, to ensure they have fully understood the text and that their message is theologically sound.
- You may wish to develop a student planning team, encouraging students to have a clear voice in the selection of themes, music and other elements of worship.



# Music in Worship

Engage students with music in worship.

- This could be through having a band and/or singers, or even a choir.
- Your home group/pastoral care group might be willing to lead the singing if they have practiced in advance. Having a PPT or visual display to accompany the music will help students feel like the attention is not all on them.
- Some music choices can be intentionally for listening and reflection only.
- Please consider a range of music styles. While it can be wonderful to include new music in a more modern style, many older hymns and songs have great lyrics. Some current bands do excellent arrangements of older songs in a more modern style.
- Ask students to help choose the music.



**MUSIC RESOURCES**  

## Resources for Secondary Worship

**PRAYER RESOURCES**  

**BIBLE STORY RESOURCES**  

**BIBLE THEME RESOURCES**  

**CREATIVE WORSHIP RESOURCES**  

**SECONDARY WORSHIP EXAMPLES & PLANNING RESOURCES**  



# Sample Worship Orders (Secondary)

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

## ORDER 1

### GATHERING

L: In the name of the Father and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit,

**C: Amen**

### [CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION - OPTIONAL]

### SONG

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

### PRAYER

*To prepare everyone to hear God's word.*

### BIBLE READING/S

### MESSAGE/RESPONSE

### PRAYER TIME

*Connect prayers to the reading for the day, and to the concerns and needs of the whole school community. Ensure that the prayers look beyond people's personal concerns to the needs of the wider world.*

### LORD'S PRAYER

### SONG

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

### BLESSING

## ORDER 2

### INTRODUCTION

*Begin worship with a thought-provoking moment – a great question to discuss with the person next to you/ a short video/a real-world scenario, etc.*

### INVOCATION/LIGHTING CANDLE

L: In the name of the Father and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit,

**C: Amen**

*[candles are lit]*

### SCRIPTURE

*Encourage students to think about how the introduction links to the reading as they listen. Students or staff read from the Bible.*

### SONG

*Before or after message if time permits.*

### MESSAGE

*Short message which draws out the connections between God's word and the introduction question or asks questions which help listeners make their own connections.*

### PRAYERS

*Include prayers for the students and staff, their families, the community and the world. Involve students in praying.*

### (LORD'S PRAYER)

### SONG

*Try to connect the song to the message of the service.*

### BLESSING

