

# INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges facing churches today is to find the best ways to plan, develop and lead worship for all ages.

## All-age worship :

- welcomes all ages in the church family
- helps young and old alike spend time together
- is appropriate for everyone there
- enables people of all ages to worship God and meet with him.

If we take church attendance figures too seriously, the dramatic fall in the numbers of children and teenagers in the church would cause despair. But I see signs of hope in the excitement, fun and profound spiritual development that takes place during what we used to call 'family services'. All-age worship is for many churches a growth area, reaching out to children, young people and families through events, mission and evangelism and providing worship that is welcoming and nurturing.



## Is your church ready?

Looking at all-age worship, we'll recognise the key reasons why it is such a vital area. It isn't only about meeting the needs of the whole congregation, regardless of age or background. It is also about helping all ages to worship our great God with wonder. A community of faith should be a community who worship and learn as one, not in fractured groups. This book offers lots of basic ideas but to make all-age worship really work you need to graft in your own vision, gifts and ideas.

## INNOVATIVE ALL-AGE WORSHIP

What are the key components in worship? If that question were easy to answer then the Christian church would be much more united and worship would be much less varied in different places!

The key components in your church may be some of the things on this list, but probably not all of them. Tick those that are regular parts of your all-age worship and then check out those that you do not do. Could you be more varied and creative, benefiting from other traditions?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set order of service             | <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional hymns             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worship songs for older people   | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship songs for all ages    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worship songs for younger people | <input type="checkbox"/> Liturgy                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confession                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Offering                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Opportunity for interaction      | <input type="checkbox"/> Game or quiz                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Item for very young children     | <input type="checkbox"/> Making or doing activity      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All-age Communion                | <input type="checkbox"/> Intercessory prayer           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical prayer                  | <input type="checkbox"/> People praying for each other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time for ministry and prayer     | <input type="checkbox"/> Formal beginning and ending   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bible reading                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Talk                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Story                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Application for all ages      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Something to take away           |  |

### Putting the components together

The list above highlights both the various possibilities and the exciting challenges of getting a balance when assembling the component parts of an all-age worship service.

- Worship needs to include an element of tradition and ritual in order for those present to feel comfortable enough to relax. We all need

boundaries and even the most reluctant teenagers will gain from knowing that there is some form of structure to the worship.

- Worship needs to have a clear beginning and a definite ending along with guidance throughout, so that all know what they should and should not be doing. Be clear about the space for reflection.
- Don't introduce too many new things at once. Aim for one new approach or idea in each service and gradually introduce ideas. The congregation will become used to a varied diet.
- Arrange an interesting programme so that there are not too many jumps and changes of gear!
- All-age worship needs to include elements for everyone, so that it is neither a children's celebration with a little 'word' for the adults or a traditional hymn thrown in to keep adults happy, or an adult service with a song or game suitable for children to enjoy.

## Activity

The current emphasis on active learning in the educational world has a great deal to teach us. All-age worship needs to push people a little so they can learn creatively. This is the most effective method for us to learn new skills and information. We are much more likely to remember things that we saw and we felt and we tried out, than things that are just said to us. Therefore, throughout all our worship – the singing, prayer, Bible interaction – we need to be actively encouraging activity!

- **Active songs.** Actions, clapping, raising hands and standing introduce action into our sung worship. An inclusive all-age church accepts that some people will want to be very active and others less so. Generations can learn from each other and demonstrate the importance of involvement, rather than passive observation.



- **Dance and movement.** Not everyone appreciates seeing or taking part in dance in worship, but for others it is a very valuable way of communicating and celebrating the love of God. Dance can be prepared by groups of all ages, male and female and can be accompanied by worship songs or other music. Dance may include the use of flags and streamers. Dance in worship should never become merely a performance but rather something that encourages the watcher to new insights and worship.

- **Giving.** The 'offering' need not be a miserable point in the service when people forget that God really loves a cheerful giver! Make this more active by asking people to bring their gifts to a certain point, pass around a hat (literally!) and play cheerful music.

- **Prayer.** There are many ways to be active in prayer. If prayer is to have any real meaning we need to be as excited about communicating with God as we are making contact with a long-lost friend. That sense of excitement and expectation is for many, best demonstrated through interacting and spontaneity.

- **Fun.** Active games that include movement and reinforce the theme, quizzes which all people can join in with, and movements or responses to a catch-phrase during the story all help to make all-age worship fun. Some adults need permission to relax and have fun, but once they do they should enjoy it and learn through it.

- **Learning.** Teaching is not always best received when coming from one person at the front. All-age worship provides a flexible opportunity to look at the word of God together in smaller groups and discuss what

it may be saying. There could be an active introduction to the Bible passage and theme before getting into groups, if the building and furniture allow.

- **Making and doing.** I am often involved with churches holding all-age weekends. They meet as a whole congregation on the Saturday to do creative things on a set theme in mixed age groups, much of which is taken and used as part of the all-age service the following day. The activities could include songs, dance, painting, drama, prayer, poetry, flower-arranging, banner-making, cookery, choral speaking, model-making and so on...the list really is endless! For more ideas see *Hands on Bible Creativity* (SU) Tracy Woodsford.



## Music and Song

For many people music and singing is a key element of worship and a great tool for communication with God. Here is an opportunity to learn doctrine and theology. If we are aiming for multi-sensory worship then music has a major part to play.

- **Music behind words.** Appropriate, non-intrusive background music playing behind prayers, confession or during the talk, can help people focus on what is being said. If you weave a simple song in with responsive prayers there is a cohesion to that part of the service.
- **Music as a gift.** The ability to play a musical instrument is a skill and a gift from God. Church music groups vary greatly in style and

### Think about...

Who has a say in the songs used in all-age worship?

How are they chosen, from what range of books and who is consulted in the process?

Is it time to review the list and reintroduce some golden oldies or bring in some fresh songs?

quality, but however great (or otherwise) they sound, they are providing opportunities for people to develop their gifts. All-age worship should ideally be led by a music group of all ages, with experienced and learning adults alongside experienced and learning children and young people.

- **Music to set the atmosphere.**

Playing a song or having a music group leading a few songs before the service formally begins, brings people together.

- **Song pitch.** Some new worship songs and many traditional hymns are pitched too high for most congregations. Take care in the choices of songs so that the congregation does not end up sounding like a cats' chorus on a bad day! Musically, a range of just over an octave C to D will be possible for most children. Adults can usually manage a wider range. Teenage boys will struggle with pitch and singing for a whole lot of other reasons!

- **Song traditions.** Most all-age congregations will be looking for a range of songs to use in worship. Despite the yearning many of us have to be up-to-date and cutting-edge, we are still part of a church whose traditions go back over 2,000 years. The first believers, meeting in secret, used spiritual songs and hymns in much the same way as David did hundreds of years before and as we do today. While there is a place