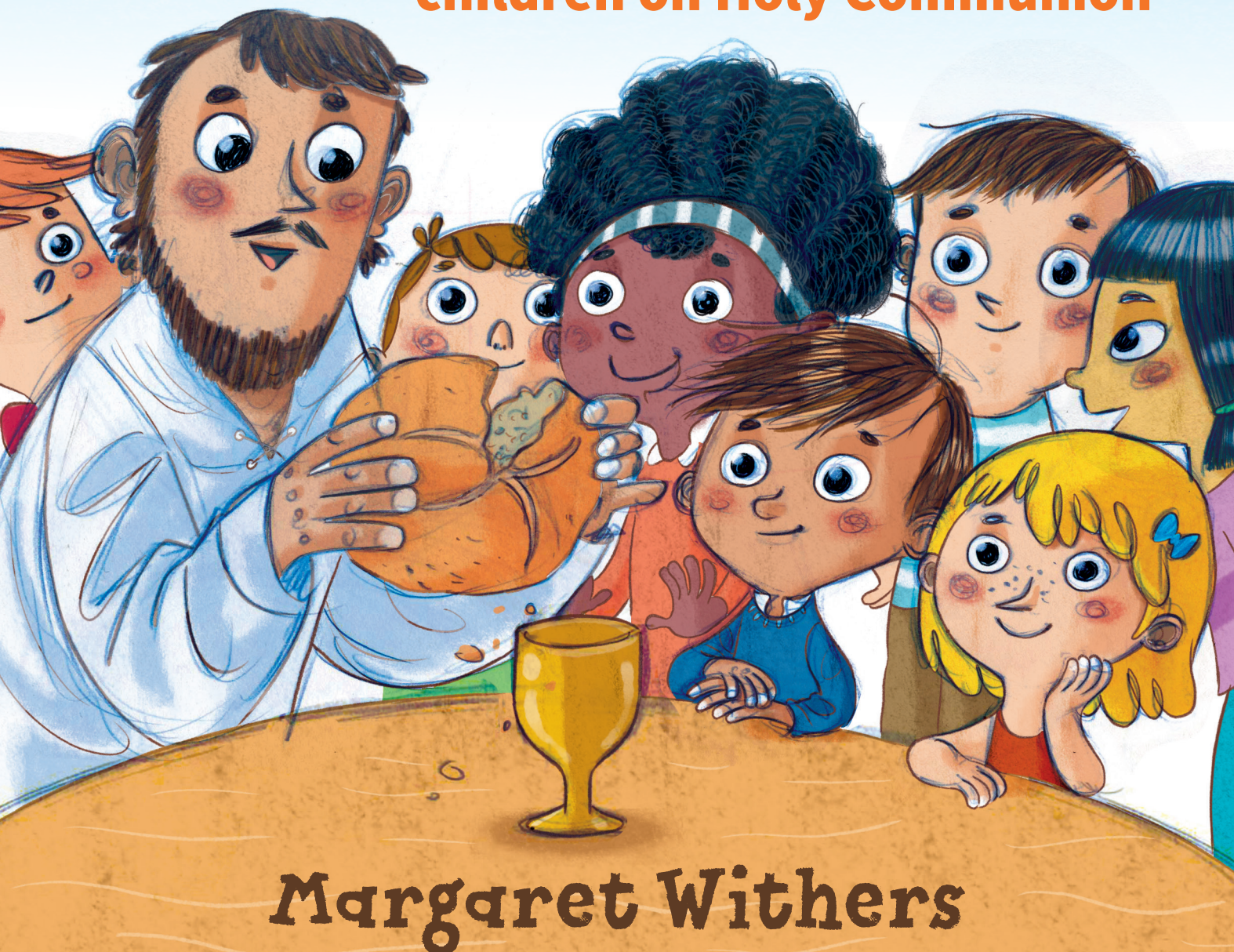


New edition

Welcome to the Lord's Table

**A practical programme for
children on Holy Communion**



Margaret Withers

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Introduction: The Lord's command

A visitor to supper

'It started on the way home on Sunday,' he said. 'You know what it's like after a holiday. The road was packed with men, some with their wives and children, even a few animals. Everyone was anxious to get out of the city before the sun started going down or we would not get home before it was dark.'

'It's hard to tell what we felt like: sort of numb with shock at what had happened. We had been sure that there was going to be some kind of revolution, and it had started with this grand procession into town and everyone shouting and cheering. It was as if even the stones on the path were cheering with us! Then it all went wrong and, next thing we knew, he had been clapped into prison.'

'We saw him the next morning, covered with blood and hardly recognisable, dragging his cross through the street. It just seemed unreal, like an awful dream; and then it was all over. He was dead.'

'I don't think that we said much to each other on that journey. Every so often we would remember something Jesus had said or something he had done. Everything we had hoped for had fallen to pieces and we just wanted to get as far away from Jerusalem as possible and back to our families.'

'Then this chap joined us. Neither of us really bothered to look at him. The setting sun was in our eyes and we were not in the mood for being friendly. He seemed a kindly sort of person and he asked us what was wrong. We tried to explain what had happened, but before we got very far, he interrupted us. Said we'd got it all wrong and started to make us see it in another way. He must have been a rabbi or some kind of scholar because he knew the scriptures inside out, and he explained how everything we had told him about Jesus could be linked with Moses and the prophets. We started getting really excited.'

'Anyway, when we got to the village it was nearly dark, so we asked him to stay the night with us. And that's when it happened. We sat down to supper and this chap took the bread, said the blessing and handed it to us. And suddenly we looked at him properly. It was Jesus.'

Cleopas paused for a moment. 'Do you know,' he continued, 'all of our depression and fear vanished. He was there, just as he always had been, and somehow

I know that it will always be like that. Whenever we break bread and remember what he did for us, he will be there.'

See Luke 24:13-35

Known to them in the breaking of bread

Since that famous journey on the road to Emmaus, when two bereaved friends invited a stranger to share their family meal and encountered the risen Lord, groups of Jesus' followers have met him in the breaking of bread in churches and chapels, in houses, in schools and in the open air. Every minute, somewhere in the world, Christ's sacrifice on the cross is recalled. Whether it is a glorious ceremony in a medieval cathedral or a scrap of bread saved from meagre rations in a refugee camp, it is the definitive way in which the vast majority of Christians obey the Lord's command, 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19b).

Closely aligned to this commandment is another: 'Love one another as I have loved you' (John 15:12), and Jesus' own prayer for his disciples '... that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21). It is tragic, therefore, that over the centuries the response to 'Do this in remembrance of me' has been a source of division and hatred, leading to fragmented families and communities, and even imprisonment and death.

Signs of hope

But there are signs of hope. Christians are praying, studying and working together in a way that would not have been dreamed of 50 years ago. In rural areas, many parish churches are ecumenical in that they are the only place of worship for a community drawn from varied religious traditions and backgrounds. In some urban areas, local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs) have flourished, with members of the congregation maintaining their distinctive traditions but 'leaving them at the church door' in order to worship and work together to the enrichment of all concerned.

All this has led to a rediscovery of eucharistic worship as the gathering of the Lord's people on the Lord's Day to celebrate his resurrection and meet him

through the breaking of bread. Children who, 30 years ago, would have had little if any experience of this worship are now present Sunday by Sunday to hear the invitation, 'Draw near with faith... all those who love the Lord.' 'Happy are those who are called to his supper.'

History has decreed that, in most of the Western Church, children have not been permitted to have a full share in his banquet, but this is changing. There has been renewed emphasis upon baptism as the sacrament of initiation of our children as fellow members of Christ's Church, not tomorrow's Christians to spend the majority, if not all, of the service in a separate room from the rest of the congregation.

Indeed, the sacraments are being seen afresh as signs of God's grace being poured out upon his people and enabling us to respond to him, rather than rites in which we principally act in our own strength.

Worship: our duty and our joy

During the last 30 years, mainstream Christian traditions have experienced major liturgical changes. Services in modern English with wider use of scripture, response to social and cultural developments and the widespread use of software to create local service sheets have opened the door to variety and change as radical as took place when the printing press was invented nearly 600 years ago.

Liturgy, however, is more than words. It means 'the work of the people' and, if that is so, worship is our primary calling and ultimate purpose. It is part of being human and can be expressed in a phrase from the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer: 'it is our duty and our joy'.

A long way to go

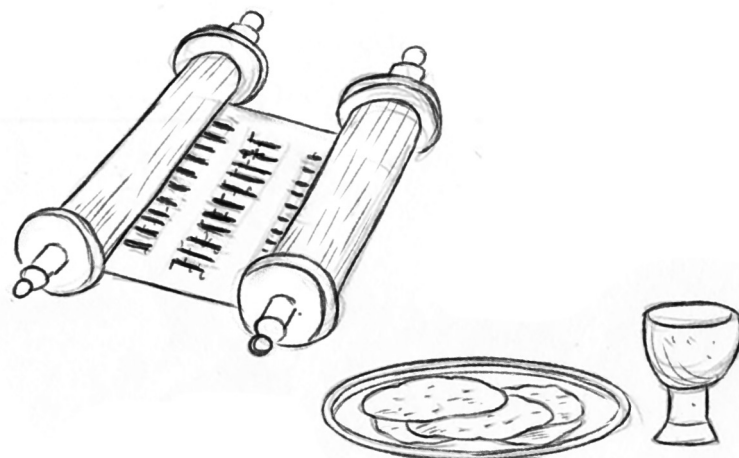
There are, however, many questions about our complex and divisive history as well as the inevitable untidiness of congregations beginning to make their own decisions concerning what is appropriate for their local communities while remaining within the teaching and practice of the wider Church. There have been enormous changes in most Christian traditions concerning children receiving Holy Communion, which are discussed in Chapter 1 of this book.

Many adults, used to the pattern of teenage confirmation or membership, have emphasised the importance of cognitive understanding and want guarantees that children who are admitted to Holy Communion will always receive worthily and remain faithful for the rest of their lives.

None of us knows what the future holds, so, while we should take reception of the sacraments seriously, we should guard against putting burdens upon our young people that we would not like to have imposed upon us. Indeed, if we erect barriers in order to restrict or control them, we may starve some of our most vulnerable Christians of this channel of God's grace. Apart from discouraging those who are young in years or in the faith, this will impoverish the whole church and the society it aims to serve.

A free gift

God's grace is freely poured out and it is not for us to question motives or calculate end results. Jesus healed ten lepers but only one returned to thank him (Luke 17:12-19). If he had to accept a 10% response rate to his gift, who are we to demand more?



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Guide to the programme

Introduction

Welcome to the Lord's Table is a flexible programme in twelve units. Individual units can be used to teach a particular subject, and some of the activities can be used when teaching on a particular Bible story or event in the Christian year.

We assume that, by the time that children have asked to receive Holy Communion, they will know something about the Christian story and will be used to joining in worship and prayers, maybe at church or school, in Junior Church, Messy Church or another Christian organisation.

Structure of the programme

The programme is composed of three blocks, two of four units each, and one of three. Each block ends with 'Marking the journey'—a short celebration after the first and second blocks, and then the first Holy Communion service after the third. The programme ends with Unit 12, which is a follow-up meeting a few weeks after the first Holy Communion service.

Each unit opens with a short reflection for leaders, as well as advice on preparation, resources and follow-up. The teaching includes activities, worship and a link to part of the Communion service. There is also a short task in the Activity Book to be done at home.

Please don't feel that you have to teach everything. You may find that some of the material is already well known so could be briefly revisited or even omitted, and that some subjects could be left to a later date. If your group enjoys acting or making beautiful posters to display, let them enjoy it and leave out something else.

First Holy Communion is a very important event, but each child's journey with God will continue for the rest of their lives.

Unit	Title	Link with the service
1	Who am I?	
2	Jesus, our friend and brother	Glory to God
3	God's family	The Peace
4	God's storybook	Gospel
Marking the journey	Celebrating God's word: Presentation of Bibles	
5	Jesus' friends	Communion of Saints
6	The glory of God	Holy, Holy, Holy
7	Thank you; please	Intercession
8	Sorry!	Penitential rite
Marking the journey	Celebrating God's forgiveness: Forgiveness tree	
9	Jesus is risen	Alleluia; Sunday
10	Let's have a party	Offertory
11	Let's share a meal	The Lord's Supper
Marking the journey	Celebrating Holy Communion: First Holy Communion	
12	All that I am	Dismissal

Telling the story

The programme is centred on storytelling and relating the stories to the children's lives. The stories are usually taken from Mark's Gospel, but readings from other books of the Bible are also used. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV) is used throughout the programme, but we accept that some teachers and leaders may prefer to read from a book of Bible stories for children, or use their own words.

Worship matters

Worshipping God and enjoying his presence is an integral part of each meeting. It is a special time when we set aside all the activities and sit quietly or maybe go into church or a special area. A prayer gabbled across an untidy table while parents hover outside satisfies nobody.

Setting the scene

If the group is small and meets in a room, finish each meeting with a time of quiet, followed by a prayer and maybe a hymn or song. If it is a larger group, create a 'sacred space' where the children can sit around a focal point such as a cross, a picture or a lighted candle. Invite each child to join it as they are ready.

Prayer

There are suggestions for prayer in each unit. Some of them are responsorial so that the children can make them their own, but the units gradually move towards encouraging children to adopt a natural and relaxed attitude by praying, aloud or in the silence of their hearts, the things that they want to say to God.

An effective way of praying is for the children to say the things that have happened for which they want to thank God, and then the things that they want to tell him. This can get quite lively if there are several children, and may include sadness and loss, so have a silence for the children to make the prayers their own; then collect the prayers by saying the Lord's Prayer together, or a prayer of your own.

Always listen to what the children have to say, but guard against directing or commenting about it. This is their conversation with God, who wants to hear what they offer to him.

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is used several times and is printed in the Activity Book. Two different versions are given in the Activity Book so that everyone can join in the one that they use at church or school.

Music

Each unit includes suggestions for music which can be used as part of the worship or as an activity to reinforce the teaching. Music can also be used to set the scene, by singing a repetitive song or chant as the children assemble, then creating a silence by humming the tune quietly and fading it out.

The music scene is moving fast, so we have suggested a few song titles but have not given any references. It is advisable to find out which songs or hymns the children know, or to ask the music coordinator at a local school for suggestions.

Organising the programme

In these days of flexi-time and pressures, it is best if the leaders and the children's families organise the programme together rather than assuming that any group can manage the same day and time each week. Every plan has to take into account the age and availability of the children, which can change from year to year, as well as the times that a room is free and the leaders are available.

Each unit is designed with teaching followed by activities and lasts about an hour, with a simple task to be done at home in the Activity Book. The children will normally receive Holy Communion after completing Unit 11 and study the final unit, 'All that I am', a few weeks after that, but Unit 9, 'Jesus is risen', could also be postponed until after the children have received Holy Communion.

Units may be taught in a different order to fit with Bible readings or if the children have an opportunity to witness a special event like a baptism (which could link with Unit 3 or 5). We hope that the children will be present for part of the service and maybe receive a blessing at Communion on most Sundays or whenever their school has a service. Each unit is related to part of the service so the youngsters can link what they have learned to their involvement in the worship.

Timing is important, but much will depend on the children's age and abilities as well as the time you give to discussion: this can be the most important part. It is usually best to teach less and do it better. Take into account the talents of the leaders and the resources needed before deciding which activities to do and how much importance to give to them.

If the children have learnt the basics of the Christian faith through being at services, Junior Church or a church school, much of the teaching in the first three units will probably be familiar. It may be best just to revise the subject with a brief discussion and then consolidate it with an activity.

Planning the programme

We strongly advise you to plan the dates for 'Celebrating God's word' (when each child receives a Bible), 'Celebrating God's forgiveness' and the first Holy Communion service before anything else. Publicise these 'Marking the journey' dates to the children's families and put them on the church calendar and the school's or other organisation's calendar if these are 'church' for the children.

The other meetings can be planned in several ways according to the needs of the group. Children often have commitments in the early evenings, and the availability of leaders and venues has also to be considered. If some of the teaching takes place on Sunday morning, it is assumed that the session will last about 45 minutes and that the children will then join the rest of the congregation in church rather than having their own worship, but this is only a suggestion.

There are three ways to organise the programme:

- 1 Set aside three days to teach each of the three blocks in one extended meeting, for example, on Saturdays, or during half-term or holidays. 'All that I am' and maybe some other items will be part of a final meeting sometime after the first Holy Communion service.

This has advantages in that there are only four dates to reserve as well as the three 'Marking the journey' dates, so it could be simple to organise and it can form a strong group. It also saves the leaders much of the time needed for setting up and packing away materials. The timetable will be similar to a shortened school day, so it is important to include time for proper breaks, with a chance to play outside. If somebody would provide lunch, it would give the meetings a social aspect as well.

This arrangement can be highly successful, but consider first whether you have the facilities and leaders who can sustain this sort of teaching.

- 2 Hold one meeting covering a single unit on a weekday after school or in the early evening, or on a Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon. If this pattern is followed, allow up to 90 minutes for the teaching and activities, with a short break between them, and finish with worship. This may be the best solution if the group is run at school or includes children who cannot be present every Sunday for family reasons, or because they sing in the choir or are servers or bell ringers.
- 3 Hold two meetings each week to cover a single unit:
 - Weekday after school: teaching, activities and worship
 - Sunday morning: follow-up to teaching, activities and 'Focus on church'

or

- Sunday morning: teaching, activities, 'Focus on church'
- Weekday after school: follow-up to teaching, activities and worship

This is a simple pattern if you have families who can cope with two meetings each week, and it may

suit the youngest children. It is less flexible than the longer meetings but easier for the leaders to sustain and evaluate. It is for the leaders to decide whether to do an activity at each session, or to start one activity and then complete it at the next meeting.

Marking the journey

If the programme is taking place in school, it is fitting that 'Celebrating God's word' (the presentation of Bibles) would take place in the context of Collective Worship and preferably a Eucharist, should the school celebrate it frequently.

'Celebrating God's forgiveness' (the forgiveness tree) can be used as an interactive Penitential Rite especially during Advent or Lent, although it might be simpler to use it as a class or year assembly where there will be fewer people involved.

If the programme is run in church or a church-based organisation, 'Celebrating God's word' can take place during a Sunday service, possibly after Communion as everyone should be present at that time. It is a lovely way to introduce the children to the congregation and to include them in the prayers. If that is not feasible, and including every child is of paramount importance, there can always be a special act of worship led by the clergy, maybe with music and artwork, at the end of a meeting.

Whatever is decided, see that the families and people from the church, school or church organisation are all invited to take part and support the children on these special occasions.

'Celebrating God's forgiveness' can be used as an extended Penitential Rite in any service, especially during Advent or Lent, or it might be simpler to make it the last part of Unit 8 and invite the families and members of the congregation to join in it.

Preparation for 'The first Holy Communion service' is described after Unit 11.

Deciding which parts to do

Sections of each unit may be selected according to time and need, but should include:

- Teaching adapted to the needs of the group
- At least one activity
- 'Focus on church'
- Worship
- The task to be done in the Activity Book

Each unit has at least two activities. Choose which to include, bearing in mind the age of the children and the composition of the group, as well as your facilities. Drama will be a good choice in a large group with confident readers, and could be used within a service if meetings can be planned to allow time for rehearsals. A small group may gain more from the 'finding out' or craft sessions.

Music can be used as an activity or as part of the worship. Whatever is chosen, have as much variety as possible to cater for everyone's interests and skills.

Should there be an opportunity to be present at a baptism or to use drama or music in a service, it should be grasped, even if it means leaving something out or covering it at a later date.

Language

What's in a name?

The programme is designed to be used by Christians of all traditions, so it aims to use language that is broad enough to be acceptable to everyone.

The service that the Lord gave us has several names, which have developed over the centuries. They are sometimes thought to be hallmarks of particular traditions and thereby become exclusive, but each one reflects an aspect of the service.

- **Breaking of bread** describes what Jesus did at the Last Supper and was continued by the first Christians (Acts 2:42).
- **Eucharist** is from the Greek for 'thanksgiving'. The great prayer that recalls the mighty works of God and calls to mind the meal that Jesus had with his friends on the night he was betrayed, his death, his resurrection and his coming again, is called the Eucharistic Prayer.
- **Holy Communion:** the word 'communion' means 'togetherness', so the name is a reflection of people gathering as God's family as well as meeting Jesus in the sacrament of bread and wine.
- **Lord's Supper** reminds us of the meal that Jesus had with his friends; in it we remember what he did and commanded us to do (Mark 14:22–25; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26).
- **Mass** comes from the Latin for the Dismissal, *Ite, missa est*. *Missa* means 'sent'. We are the sent people of God, so the Dismissal at the end of the Eucharist is a command to go out to feed the world with the love of God.

Words: a short glossary

Altar table: The altar or Communion table.

Body of Christ: The people of God, especially in the context of service. The phrase is sometimes used when administering Holy Communion.

Children: Any person up to about 12 years. 'Young people' implies an age span from 11 to about 17 years.

Church: With a capital 'C', the word refers to the universal Church or a denomination, like the Methodist Church. When lower case is used, it refers to a local church as a congregation or a building.

Clergy: An ordained person or people. 'Priest' or 'minister' is also used.

Congregation: The laity or lay people (not clergy) in a church community.

Eucharistic worship: Any service that includes Holy Communion.

Family: The natural or adoptive parents or people with parental responsibility with whom the child lives. They may live with another relation or with foster parents, but children usually call this their family.

Holy Communion: The sacrament of bread and wine; the service in which it is received.

Liturgy: Any public service, especially in its design and delivery—not necessarily eucharistic.

President: The person who has overall oversight of the worship. In Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, this is an ordained priest. In other denominations it will be an ordained minister or maybe an appointed lay person.

Service: A more formal term than 'act of worship'; for example, 'The main service is a Eucharist'.

Worshipping community: Broader than 'congregation', this term is used largely in a pastoral context.

Preparation and resources

If the programme is to run smoothly, regular planning and evaluation are vital, especially with inexperienced leaders. It is probably best to plan and then evaluate a block of about three units and then prepare the next block rather than preparing the whole programme at once.

Planning and evaluation can be ongoing, with five minutes together or exchanging text messages after each meeting, when comments and suggestions are easily called to mind.

However you organise your planning, keep notes about anything that goes wrong or especially well, to be discussed later or noted before you do the programme again.

This is a practical programme, so see that someone has responsibility for assembling the resources and putting the displays in church. Many an activity has collapsed because paper or a candle were forgotten, so this job is very important. It need not be done by a leader. Any practical-minded person may like to make this their contribution to the programme.

Outline drawings of items are needed for a few of the craft activities. Some may be copied from the Activity Book and others may be downloaded from the internet. Each unit has a list of resources needed for the activities.

The Ready Box and other resources

Basic materials that will be needed almost every time are not listed in every unit. Make a 'Ready Box' so that you have them assembled for each meeting. Contents could include:

- A Bible or book of Bible stories
- A cross or candle for worship
- Paper
- Felt-tipped pens
- Pencils, erasers and sharpener
- Drawing-pins or other fasteners
- Adhesive sticks
- Scissors

We hope that you will have a display board to show some of the things that the children have been doing. If you haven't, include some large sheets of paper for making displays. Have a CD player so that you can include recorded music as part of the worship. Make sure you know where equipment like rubbish bags and dustpans are kept.

The children will not usually need Bibles, as the teaching is based on storytelling rather than reading together, but they might like to bring the ones that are presented to them and join in reading or following the story if the exact text is being used.

The Activity Book

The Activity Book is largely pictorial, with drawings and spaces for filling in words and short sentences.

Each unit includes a task in the book to be done at home. This allows children to work at their own pace and can also involve their families. If a child's family has difficulty in providing the help that is needed, it may be useful to find someone else to provide support.

The Activity Book is part of the children's offering to God, so they should be encouraged to take pride in it, but the work should never be marked competitively or used as a measure of a child's spiritual growth.

Be aware of children who find writing difficult or have other special needs, and see that instructions are always clear and to the point, or ask their family for advice.

Think and discuss

The following list may seem daunting but not all of it will apply to your church. Some items may need a planning meeting. Others are straightforward decisions or jobs.

- Which will be the best timetable for the programme?
- Are there any situations we have to bear in mind—for example, a child who cannot come to every Sunday meeting or would find it difficult to get to meetings after school?
- Do any of the children have special needs?
- Have we catered for a child with a disability?
- How shall we plan and evaluate the meetings?
- Will we use the NRSV Bible readings or a book of Bible stories in the meetings?
- Which version of the Bible shall we present to the children?
- Who will find out which songs and hymns the children use in school or at a club?
- Who will keep a register and communicate with the families?
- Who will order the Bibles and Activity Books?
- Who will take charge of providing resources?
- Who will see that the hall or room is booked and set out before each meeting?



Unit 6

The glory of God

Leaders' personal reflection

The themes of glory and of faith play an important part in John's Gospel. He writes in his prologue, 'We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Jesus' first miracle, at the wedding at Cana, when he changed water into wine, 'revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him' (John 2:11).

In this unit, we celebrate the revelation of God in the person of Jesus. Three of his disciples went up a mountain with him to pray. While they were there, they saw him as the Son of God with the glory of God shining through him.

Experiences of all sorts can lead to a vivid awareness of the reality and power of God. How can we use the signs and symbols around us, and the children's own experiences, to deepen their faith?

Do we feel bound to explain how or why God does everything or can we simply say, 'I don't know, but isn't it wonderful'?

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.

PSALM 148:11-13

Aim

To explore the idea of spiritual experience and the revelation of God in the person of Jesus.

Objectives

- To experience the glory of God in creation and in people.
- To recognise that worship is putting ourselves in the presence of God and can be done at any time or place.
- To explore the use of 'sacred space' and silence in worship.

This unit is about worship: enjoying being with God, listening to him and talking to him. That experience lasts a lifetime and your children will all have different experiences, so we have more varied activities and worship for you to use as you wish.

Resources

You will need:

- The Ready Box
- Pens for colouring
- A CD of quiet instrumental music
- A candle or other focal point for prayer—for example, a cross or picture



- Items that show the glory of God by their beauty: flowers, pebbles, glass beads and so on

Preparation

Prepare the frieze illustrated on page 83 onwards by drawing the words 'This is my Son, whom I love; listen to him!' in bubble writing. Put each word on a separate piece of paper for colouring in.

One activity involves going on a walk to look for signs of the glory of God. If you decide to do this, ensure that the children's parents / carers have given written permission for their children to leave the church during the meeting. Prepare a short note with the name and address of your church or school and the following information.

The children who are being prepared for admission to Holy Communion will be going for a short walk to

on

This is to look for signs of the glory of God in the world and will take no more than 30 minutes. I will be leading the group and will be assisted by two / three of the other children's leaders.

Signed

I give permission for my child (name) to go on the walk as part of the Holy Communion meeting on

He/she has no health issues. Or He/she suffers from and will need in emergency.

He/she keeps this medication with him/her. Or I will hand the medication to you or another leader.

Signed

Contact no

Before you start

As the children arrive, give each child a piece of paper with a word on it to start colouring in for the frieze. Use the opportunity to look at the Activity Books to check that all the work has been completed.

Teaching time



Start by reminding the children that even though Jesus was the Son of God, he looked just like any other person. Last week, we learned that Jesus was a teacher who travelled about with his friends and followers—his disciples. Sometimes he was teaching huge crowds; other times, he just wanted to be with a few friends. Today's story tells us about a time when Jesus was with Peter, James and John, and they saw Jesus with the glory of God shining through him.

Before you read the following Bible passage, ask the children to sit still while you play some quiet music to set the atmosphere.

Read the story of the transfiguration of the Lord over the music and then fade it out after you have finished.



Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'... Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

MARK 9:2-5, 7-8

Allow a short silence, then speak quietly.

Explain that Jesus showed his glory, the glory of God, and for a moment his friends saw him as he really was. The world is full of God's glory. We have glimpses of it in beautiful things in the world he created and in people who we love.

Activities

Do one of the following 'finding out' activities, choosing the one that is most appropriate for your group. Bear in mind the children's backgrounds, their experience of exploring the world around them, worship and prayer, and their ages.

Finding God's glory in ordinary things

Go for a walk. This may be through unfamiliar surroundings, if some children don't live nearby; or it may be through places you see every day, just down the road or at the shops.

Look for signs of the glory of God while you are on the journey. Flowers, birds, water, the clouds or the sun behind buildings, even cracks on walls or paving stones, can be signs of God and lead us to a sense of his presence.

If you have a churchyard, this could be the time to explore it. Churchyards are often full of trees and flowers; and the gravestones, with the names and ages of people, perhaps whole families, are witness to the generations of people who have lived, married, given birth to children and worshipped there, but are now enjoying the closer presence of God.

Special moments

Let the children talk about special times when they have had a glimpse of God's glory in the world. It may be something as unusual and beautiful as a rainbow or something simple like seeing the sun set behind tall buildings or feeling its warmth on their arms.

These moments can lead us towards being aware that we are in the presence of God and worshipping him. They may be linked to particular places or occasions: at home, in church, in the open air, or when something very special has happened.

Most of the time, life is rather ordinary and it is not easy to remember that God is with us. We can use things to help us, like sitting quietly before we pray, listening to music, or looking at a cross or a lighted candle.

Encourage the children to offer comments about praying. Be willing to share your own experiences of prayer, including the times that you find it difficult or you give up. Remind the children that the disciples heard the words 'This is my Son; listen to him!' God told the disciples who Jesus was and ordered them to listen to him. When we pray, we need to listen to God as well as talking to him.

Continuing the disciples' experience

Ask the children, 'How do you think the disciples felt when they saw God's glory shining through Jesus?' Collect some of the words.

What did the disciples begin to understand about Jesus? That he was not just a man but was God. Before this time, they may have wondered who he was, but now they saw it for themselves. Explain that Peter wanted to make tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, so that this wonderful vision would go on for ever. But life is not like that. We cannot contain this sort of experience of the presence of God. It is rather like getting glimpses of the sun on a cloudy day.

Encourage the children to talk about times when they have felt the presence of God, maybe when they were alone, in church, or on a Christian weekend or pilgrimage. It may also have been in the open air, as happened to the disciples.

Invite the children to offer comments about praying. Be willing to share your own experiences of prayer, including the difficulties and times that you slip up.

Craft

If time allows, start to create a frieze with the words that the children have been colouring, the words that the disciples heard: 'This is my Son, whom I love; listen to him!' Stick them on the frieze. You will continue this activity in the next meeting.

Focus on church: reflective worship



Create a 'sacred space' with a ring of cushions or a carpet where the children can sit around the edge.

Place a lighted candle in the centre and display a few objects that remind us of the glory of God: flowers, pretty stones, glass, crystals or shells.

Invite the children to go in one by one, as they are ready, then recall the transfiguration story by listening to a few bars of the music and then fading it out to create a silence.

Thank God for this time together. Ask the children if there is anything they want to thank God for, either by speaking aloud or in their thoughts. Sum up by singing a song from the following list or another one that you know well.

Music

- Be still and know that I am God
- Father, we love you, we worship and adore you
- Peace, perfect peace

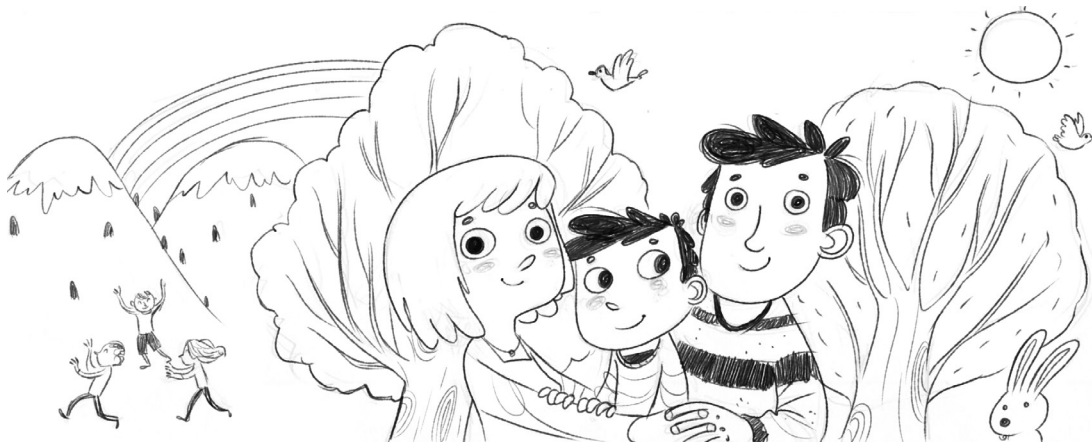
Tasks



Ask each child to bring something to the next meeting that reminds them of the glory of God to decorate the frieze. It can be their own drawing, picture or small item, and may be connected with nature but also with worship—for example, candles or a cross. Complete Unit 6 in the Activity Books.

Further action for leaders

- Check that a date has been arranged for any children to be baptised. If this will be at the first Holy Communion service, remember to add it to your planning.
- Start to plan 'Marking the Journey: Celebrating God's forgiveness'.



Welcome to the Lord's Table is a fully revised edition of a highly successful programme, used in many churches and denominations throughout the UK. Rewritten for a new generation, it has been brought up to date, fully reflecting changes in both church process and church culture over recent years. New illustrations and new content will enhance the book's appeal and usefulness.

Aimed primarily at church ministers, children's workers, parents and teachers who want to enable children aged 7–9 to participate fully in eucharistic worship, the introductory chapters explore the background to the question of preparing young children for Holy Communion, give guidance on preparing the congregation, training leaders and involving the family, and include a guide to using the programme. The programme itself comprises eleven flexible teaching units and is designed to last approximately three months overall, with the children receiving Holy Communion towards the end of the programme.

Each unit begins with leaders' personal reflections to help prepare those who are leading for the task ahead. These are followed by sections on aims and objectives, resources and preparation, teaching, activity, Bible reading, focus on church, prayer and worship.

Centred on relating Bible stories to the children's lives, the units explore:

- Who am I?
- Jesus, our friend and brother
- God's family
- God's storybook
- Jesus' friends
- The glory of Good
- Sorry!
- Thank you; please
- Jesus is risen
- Let's have a party!
- Let's share a meal
- All that I am

Punctuation points mark the journey:

- Celebrating God's word
- Celebrating God's forgiveness
- The first Holy Communion service

Welcome to the Lord's Table has fulfilled a very real need and was a ground breaking publication. I like the fact that it has 'post communion' material so that the process doesn't just end with admission. This new edition will be welcomed.

**Mary Hawes, National Children & Youth Adviser,
Church of England**

