



Notes to accompany

Gathering Together

A service outline for use in schools to acknowledge loss and celebrate life

This is potentially a very sensitive time and will need special preparation and follow-up in order to ensure that the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of all members of the school community are safeguarded as effectively as possible (see note below). Much of the preparation is likely to take place in classrooms or small groups. It would be helpful if the adults leading these sessions can feed back any key responses from pupils to the person organising the service so they can take these into consideration when planning.

The following are some suggestions to help prepare for this time together:

- Each person should have something personal and physical to hold. Make sure that appropriate hygiene guidelines and practices are in place. Symbolism of whatever objects are used could be explored in classes before the whole school gathering takes place.
Examples of objects which could be used – stones (rough stones representing pain, smooth stones representing ordinary memories, gem stones representing special memories – see Winston's Wish resources); stones could also be used to create a pathway or rainbow of hope; different coloured stones eg green for positive, good things to remember, red for worries and concerns which can be placed somewhere symbolic (eg in water); palm crosses from this year's Palm Sunday which may still be available.
- Use of *Badger's Parting Gifts* – God's gifts to us all.
- Prayer spaces in schools – create appropriate spaces for prayer and reflection in school during the days leading up to the event. These could be physical spaces, time-related spaces or curriculum-related spaces (see www.prayerspacesinschools.com)
- Ask the pupils what their worries and concerns are so that these can be taken into account when planning.
- Acknowledge that the threat from the virus might not be over. There will still be worries, anxiety and concerns. It's like being on a train journey with different stations along the way where we might pause to reflect before continuing on the journey.

- How can we manage and embrace all these different needs so that there is a sense of togetherness?
- Use of a prayer tree / a book or folder with images and words which could then be referred to at the beginning of the gathering to acknowledge that as we gather to meet with God we come as we are and as we are feeling at this particular moment in time.
- Opportunity to pay tribute to those who have passed away during this season (not only those who had Covid-19?).

After the service it would be helpful to provide opportunities for all members of the school community to process/reflect/pray about their experience of the service. These are some suggestions:

- Creating/maintaining prayer spaces – see note above.
- Opportunities to contribute to a prayer tree/book/folder with images and words which could then be referred at future times of collective or individual reflection.

Further suggestions can be found in the CEEO resource, *Never the Same*.

A note on safeguarding from Sam Dennis (Deputy DDE)

As we provide opportunities for pupils to ask questions, reflect upon things that have happened and create safe spaces for this, it is important to remember this maybe the point when pupils feel comfortable enough to share concerns that are of a safeguarding nature. Staff must remember that in creating safe places to talk they cannot guarantee confidentiality, all safeguarding concerns must be reported through the usual channels to the designated safeguarding lead.

Remember:

- **Do not** make any promises
- **Do not** ask leading questions
- **Do** listen carefully and as soon as possible make a detailed record of the conversation
- **Do** report to the DSL through the usual route

Anne Lumb
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