



are
welcome

All are welcome!

Designed to support all churches, regardless of whether they have children and young people in their midst, this resource considers how all are welcome in God's kingdom. How do we ensure that people don't simply fit in, but truly know that they belong and are valued, just as they are, both within our church communities and within God's family? Who are the people on the margins whom we might wish to assure of a true and sincere welcome? How might we take the message of welcome into our wider local community? This resource contains opportunity to consider together as a congregation the welcome you might extend. We can't do everything at once – at least not overnight – so why not choose one thing to work on and aim to do that well?

In the centre, you will find a sample of our free weekly resource for children and young people aged 0 to 16, *Faith Adventures*, on this theme. Visit bit.ly/FACT_resource to find many more!

Find our linked free downloadable Holiday Club, *The Clubhouse* on our website: bit.ly/47WpDs1. This resource is not just for children – there are appendices on the same theme for under fives, 11 to 14s, vintage holiday clubs/vintage messy church or for an intergenerational event. Why not take a look?

And if you are considering how you welcome or would welcome children and young people if they walk through your door, perhaps now is the time to talk to your Synod children and youth work specialist (CYDO or equivalent) about the Children and Youth Friendly Church Scheme: bit.ly/CYFCscheme.

All contents of this booklet are free to photocopy, to adapt for your setting and to share. They are also available as a download on our website, along with some additional resources: bit.ly/URC-all-age-themed-resource.

You speak

(Romans 15:4-13, Matthew 3:1-12)

God, you speak
in different times and different ways,
through different people in different places;
through written word, silent prayers,
testimonies, and hearts moved to praise.

You speak
with the accent of every culture, creed
and social standing,
entrusting to each a glimpse of you.

You speak through people like us –
who look like us and think like us,
and observe the customs we hold dear;
then your tone seems warm and familiar,
comforting, safe –
a welcome sound in a changing world.

You speak through those who are very
different from us;
your words may be unexpected,
and difficult for us to hear,
challenging us with new or
uncomfortable insights,
stirring us from complacency
and moving us to action for your sake.

God of all peoples,
however you speak, whenever you speak,
grant that we would hear your voice,
and make us open to your word.

Karen Campbell

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all are welcome – REGARDLESS OF AGE

The term 'ageism' was first coined in the 1960s. It is generally applied to prejudice or discrimination against older people because of age, but it could equally be used about prejudice or discrimination against younger people and children. So how do we make sure that 'All are welcome' in our churches regardless of age? And not only welcome, but knowing that they belong, that they are valued, that they have a part to play in the body of Christ?

Activity one

Give each member of your group a piece of card about the size of a sticky note, pens and pencils. Explain that you want them to imagine Anytown Church, a URC with a thriving congregation in a reasonably large church. As they walk through the door for the first time, they are greeted by a steward called Alex. On the piece of card, they should draw a picture of Alex. Compare the pictures. Group them according to age. Which age groups are represented the most? The least? Which genders? Ethnicity? What about disabilities? What does this tell us about any assumptions we make?



Activity two

Draw a child, a young person, an adult between 30 and 60, and an older person. Think about these words and phrases that you might hear in a church setting and for each of the four people, think about and discuss how the phrase might affect them:

- Ours is an ageing church
- The young people are always looking at their phones during worship
- It's difficult to entertain the children during worship
- If only the older folk could just accept change
- Children can't become members as they're not old enough to understand what it means
- We're an elderly congregation, we can't engage in youth work
- Older people need to step aside to make way for the next generations
- Children and young people are the church of tomorrow
- Will the new minister appeal to the young people?
- Retired people have more time on their hands to take on all the roles that need doing in church
- We need someone to do tech who is experienced and won't make mistakes
- You're looking good for your age.

Activity three

On large sheets of paper, draw and label circles to represent your church activities that take place across the week/year (eg, Messy Church, men's curry club etc) and the roles people do as part of your church (eg, flower arranging, making coffee after church, greeter). Take coloured dot stickers, with each colour representing a different age group (0-5, 5-11, 11-16, 16-25, 25-50, 50-65, 65-80, 80+), and put stickers into each circle to show who might be able to go to that activity/take on that role. Each time you place a sticker, be able to justify your response. Look at the circles together and discuss whether they reveal anything about ageism in your church setting. Are there any changes you

could make that might make everyone feel more welcome? (Sometimes the correct answer is 'no', but the important thing is that you've thought about it!) Ensuring all are welcome and know they belong and are valued depends on getting to know individuals rather than judging by stereotypes, discerning their strengths and gifts, and respecting and catering for their needs. How can different ages support each other in playing their part in the mission of God? One answer has to be intergenerational – not only engaging in intergenerational activities, but also building an intergenerational ethos where each is open to learning from the other, sharing together, supporting each other, praying for each other as one body. There is more in this booklet about different intergenerational approaches.

If you're thinking about how to best equip the older generations in your church and community in their discipleship and discipling of others, take a look at www.faithinlaterlife.org. To find out more about child participation, watch bit.ly/URCCYW-participation.

romans 15:7-13

Romans 15:7-13 (*The Message*)

So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now you do it! Jesus, staying true to God's purposes, reached out in a special way to the Jewish insiders so that the old ancestral promises would come true for them. As a result, the non-Jewish outsiders have been able to experience mercy and to show appreciation to God. Just think of all the Scriptures that will come true in what we do!

For instance:

Then I'll join outsiders in a hymn-sing;
I'll sing to your name!

And this one:

Outsiders and insiders, rejoice together!

And again:

People of all nations, celebrate God!
All colors and races, give hearty praise!

Lectio Divina

This is a simple method of praying and meditating on scripture. There are various ways to engage in it.



One example is READ: read the passage slowly out loud twice, with a minute of silence in between.

RELISH: focus on a word or phrase that really stood out for you. How is this word speaking to you? Share your word/phrase with others.

RE-READ one more time.

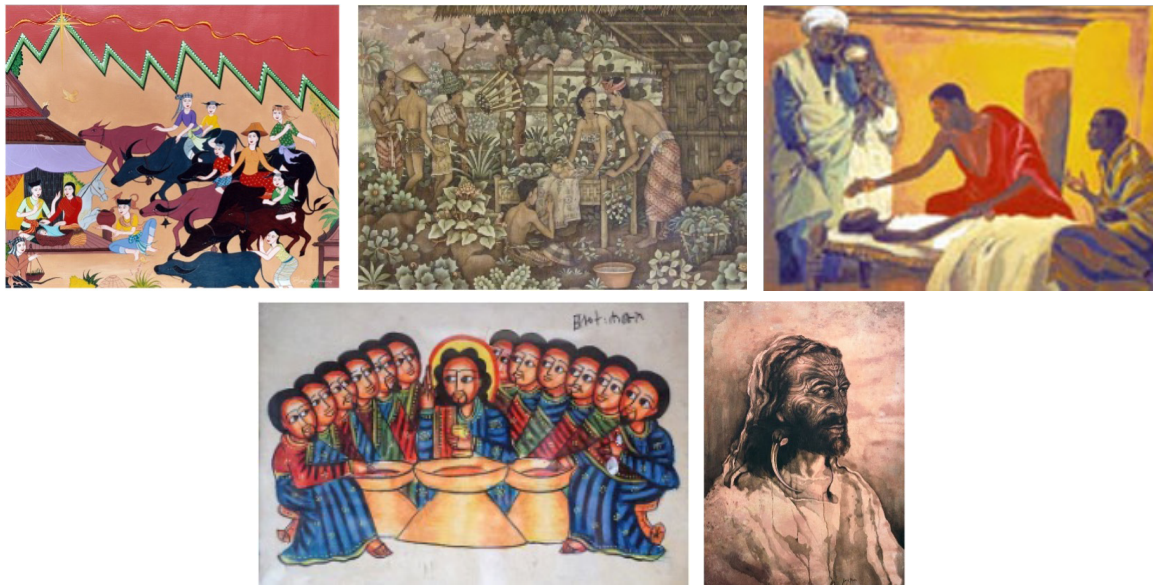
RESPOND: pray, quietly or out loud, about what you sense God is saying to you.

REST: take time to rest with God and with the word/phrase and with each other.

RESOLVE: share with one another one way in which you might be able to respond to what God has given to you through this reading.

all are welcome – and you can see that

There can be few, if any, churches where the congregation and leadership would not say that all are welcome, but sometimes the resources we use do little to reinforce that welcome. The words and the images that people encounter in church can sometimes seem alien to them and fail to reflect that the gospel is about people just like them. An example is the images that people see of Jesus. Look at the pictures below and think carefully about what they represent and how each makes you feel.

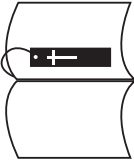








From top left to bottom right: Thailand: The Nativity by Sawai Chinnawong, Indonesia: In Bethlehem by I Wayan Turun, Cameroon: Jesus Mafa. Healing of the Daughter of Jairus, from Art in the Christian Tradition bit.ly/4hfW8W6, Ethiopian: Last Supper anon, Maori: Jesus by Sofia Minson

All too often, Jesus is pictured with white skin and blue eyes, while his heritage would have given him an olive-brown skin tone and brown eyes, and the custom of the time was for short, dark, probably curly, hair and beard. Have a walk around your church – can you find any images of Jesus or the disciples? Are they authentic in this respect? If not, is there a balance of ethnicities represented? Generally, do the images you use reflect the full diversity of God's family, whether on your PowerPoint slides, the pictures around your church building, the illustrations in the books and Bibles you use. Are there images of people of different ethnicities, of all generations, with visible disabilities, in different styles of dress? Does everybody visiting your building see something there that they can identify with and that tells them they belong? See the URC guidance: urc.org.uk/your-church/church-guides/portraying-diversity.

Similarly, what about the Bible versions you use? Have you considered the language used in them, and whether it is understandable to all who read or hear it in your church? Is God gendered as 'he' or can you find a version where God is simply referred to as God? Are God's people referred to as men, or using other male terminology? Why not use www.biblegateway.com to research different versions of the reading you're planning to use in your Bible study or Sunday service? And finally, what about the people you invite to take on roles in the church? What do people see when they walk through the door? Who are the welcomers, the readers, the people gathering the offertory, the preachers, and the people serving drinks? What message might they give to a visitor about whether they would be welcome to take on such a role, should they feel that call?

Walking the Way challenge

Can you complete at least one challenge from each column?	God Intergenerational 	World Outdoor 	Community LGBTQ+ 	Others Disability aware 	Church Antiracism 	Home Neurodiversity 	Ourselves Ageism 
Go out and do	Share your story in church.	Walk around the woods/forest and immerse yourself in nature. This is sometimes called a forest bath.	Make a gift, cake or biscuit to share with your neighbours.	Take a walk in your local area and see how accessible it is for those who have a physical difference, such as using a wheelchair or visual impairment.	You could create a flag or banner to hang in your church to represent the different ethnicities (or towns, counties, birth places) of your congregation.	Post an encouraging meme or message on socials if you have them, or to a friend if not.	Offer to help someone who is a different age to you.
Think – reflect	Take on someone else's job at home today to see what it's like to step into their shoes.	Is there something you could change at home to help the environment? Recycle more, repair something instead of replacing it?	How could you include someone new into something you are doing at home or at school?	Send a picture postcard to someone who cannot get out of the house much.	Look through your bookshelf (or at the library) to see how many books are written by or involve people of a different ethnicity to you.	Do something nice for someone without being asked first.	Each night you go to bed, thank God for something really good which happened in the day.
Talk to God	Pray that you can be a good example to all ages.	Pray for the homeless who often live outside.	Pray for those who struggle to be themselves.	Pray for those who find it hard to join in.	Pray for peace among people and countries.	Pray for the unique gifts and talents we all have.	Pray for someone older than you and someone younger than you.
Bible verse to read and learn	Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:28	But whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. John 4:14	I will say to those called "Not my people". "You are my people" and they will say "You are my God." Hosea 2:23	Today we have seen amazing things! Luke 5:26c	All of you together are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of that body. 1 Corinthians 12:27	If one part of the body suffers then all the other parts suffer with it. 1 Corinthians 12:12	Let the little children come to me. Mark 10: 14b

all are WELCOME 'in this place'

Church buildings can be both our biggest asset and our largest stumbling block, when considering welcoming people and greeting all ages. Steps, doors, toilets, decoration, booking system, signage, security, accessibility, cleanliness and clutter all have an impact on people's first impressions around hospitality and ongoing impressions of welcome. Here are some thoughts and resources around some of these areas.

What we see that is welcoming

Noticeboards

Outside – keep these up to date, well maintained and relevant. These are the windows of the church for passers-by. They are your statement boards and information point. They show what you believe, what you hope for and what is happening that others can join. These will draw the eye, prompt conversations and show the church is alive and well.

Before:



After:



Inside – what 'vibe' does your church want to have – what ambiance and atmosphere? When people are walking through the entrance; do the posters and information tell who you are, what you are passionate about and why you are there?

When toddler groups, dance classes, U3A or book club bookings are in your space – is it clear you are a church, that you follow Jesus and want others to know God loves them? We are not village halls; we have a message to share and an

invitation to give. Consider what you have already and what you would like to add. Do you have members, friends or relatives who could create bespoke posters for you?

Virtual

A web presence can be useful if it is up-to-date and representative of who you are and what you offer. Choosing between a simple holding information page with contacts for up-to-date events and activities or an interactive and current virtual noticeboard that is constantly maintained is vital to remain relevant and accessible.

Resources

Canva: Apply for a non-profit account and access design tools for free: www.canva.com.
Become a communications volunteer with the URC: bit.ly/4aYMXYW.

Search on the internet 'Church noticeboards' and compare different designs and styles. iChurch is a service from the URC that helps you build and manage your church or community group website – email iChurch@urc.org.uk or visit: www.ichurch.website.

What we physically need to feel welcomed

All churches have had to grapple with legal requirements for access and some buildings have been easier to adapt than others. It can cost a lot to revamp entrances and internal multi-level buildings. Often, Synod grants are available to help meet costs. It isn't only about ramps and door widths, though.

Toilets

If someone is unable to use the toilet easily, the welcome is diminished. This means knowing where the toilet is and what is offered in the space.



- Fully accessible changing (see **changing-places.org**) – plus signage reminding people not all disabilities are visible.
- Waste bins for sanitary wear and incontinence pads – male and female.
- Access to baby change facilities for both men and women, and clear instructions on how to dispose of nappies.
- Potties, child toilet seats and small steps make using toilets and sinks easier for children.
- Consider if toilets in their own space need gendering. Women often have to wait longer while men's toilets are empty. For transgender and non-binary people, ungendered toilets are easier to navigate. If the toilet is self-sufficient, with toilet and sink combined, could this be just a toilet, not a men's or a women's? After all, this is true of most disabled accessible toilets.
- Consider dementia and child-friendly signage to help people enter and exit the toilet space.

Getting around

We know the building, but do our users? It is helpful to clearly mark which room is which, signs for the toilet, kitchen and cleaning cupboard, and signs showing rooms that are not to be entered.

Consider adopting a style that can be replicated as buildings are added to, adapted and developed, so that signage remains consistent and fresh. Explore what colours and combinations work for those with sight impairment, additional needs or colour blindness.



If you have a team who can meet and greet new users, and one-off bookings, such as children's parties and concerts, this can enable a feel of familiarity and care. Could you have a party co-ordinator, who offers a small, Bible-based book to every child as a gift, which includes an invite to Messy Church or simply wishes them a happy birthday? Generous hospitality and care.



Simple interactions go a long way to expressing welcome as well as an opportunity to share information about activities the church is running, such as Messy Church, FoodShare tables or social groups. Every conversation is an opportunity to paint a welcoming and invitational picture of church life, planting seeds that may one day grow and bear fruit.

Accessible resources

- **changing-places.org**
- **bit.ly/3D7uU6c**
- **bit.ly/43a3il6**
- **bit.ly/42lqk90**
- **signs-4-churches.co.uk**
- **bit.ly/3Eply6d**

Who we encounter to be welcomed

Booking systems

Every church has a different booking system.

- Does your booking secretary have a welcoming and cheery disposition as the first contact?
- How are they given the guidance on who can book, when it is available and what is prohibited or permissible?
- Are costs clear, consistent and upfront?
- Are deposits taken?
- Is it easy to pay?
- Is the relevant booking paperwork up-to-date and ready for signing?
- How are the rates and information regularly reviewed or updated?

Church fellowship

No church would ever describe themselves as unwelcoming and yet it is easy to be that during the week or on a Sunday morning. Does your

fellowship take time together to consider this within Elders and church meetings? Considering how the space is used and accessed by one-off bookings, regular users, different ages and church members is one facet but so is the culture and attitude of regular attenders.

Communication is key

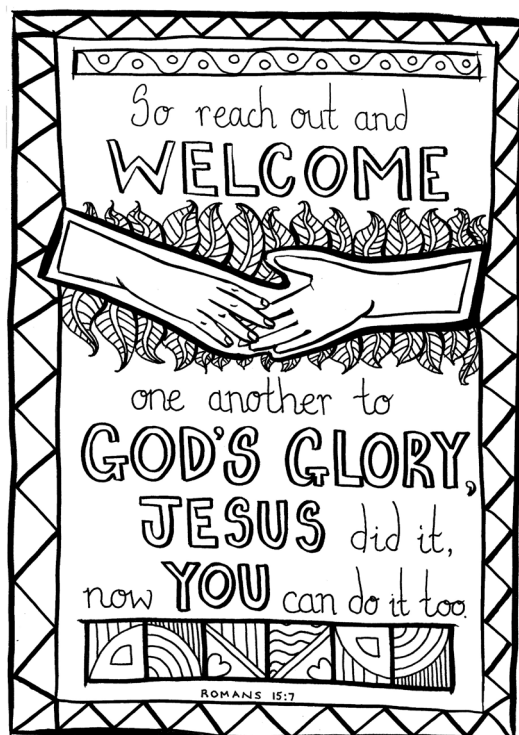
- Chat to those with additional requirements and ask what is needed to help them access church and worship easily. Everyone will be different, so be sure to listen carefully for specifics.
- Know and speak about together, the reality that many people don't know how to be in a church space, especially for significant occasions, such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. Be clear about this when you welcome people to use phones for making memories, how and why we pause to pray, where facilities are and how the regular members are happy to answer questions or help.
- Be slow to chastise and keen to appreciate why some behaviours differ from expected norms. Church could be the one space where someone with different needs feels welcomed, valued and cared for.

Resources

- bit.ly/3ETsQzi
- beckymakatontutor.co.uk
- bit.ly/3EVfx1c
- bit.ly/41vLpCA.

Colouring pages

Find these A4 downloadable colouring pages (right) and a puzzle page on: bit.ly/URC-all-age-themed-resource.



all are welcome – WHEN WE WORSHIP TOGETHER intergenerationally

All together worship, all ages, life-stages and abilities coming together as an intergenerational community of faith, is a fundamental way in which we experience the radical welcome of God into the diverse and inclusive people of God. Yet crafting worship that works for everyone often seems impossible!

This year, as we explore our theme of 'All are welcome', we encourage you to experiment with how worship is co-created by taking steps towards including everyone in the crafting process.

1 Corinthians 14:26 (*EasyEnglish Bible*)

My Christian friends, this is what you should do when you meet together. Some of you may have a song to praise God. Some of you may have a lesson to teach about God. Other people may have a special thing that God has shown to them. Some people may have a message in a special language. Other people may explain what the message means. Do all these things to help the church become stronger.



All are welcomers

Who greets people at the door, welcomes everyone collectively as you start to move into worship? Why not review this, and start by asking who is a naturally welcoming person? Who makes you feel glad to be there?

Hopefully, your answers will include a wide range of people, including some different ages. Can you invite them to be part of the welcoming team? We feel more welcome if we see someone we identify with in some way welcoming us, so it is important to include a diversity of people in these roles. And that diversity will find expression in HOW they welcome people if it is a genuine and authentic welcome.

All are welcome to use music in worship

Who chooses the hymns or songs? Can a variety of people be involved in this? Perhaps everyone could be invited to vote for their favourite three hymns or worship songs and the results shared with the church. Invite people to share music that speaks to them of God (it might be classical, personal favourites associated with memories or current popular music) and create a church playlist. Music can be played while people are arriving, praying, during communion, or having coffee and biscuits.

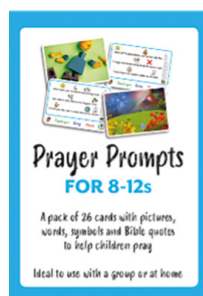
Can worship songs and hymns be chosen with everyone in mind? Think about how accessible the language is, whether people are familiar with the tune, whether it refers to a diversity of people (especially different ages). Can some time be given to teaching the sung worship before or within the service? Songs with call and response or simple repeated lines enable people to join in more easily. New words to a well-known tune are easier than familiar words to a new tune. Remember not everyone can read and comprehend words at the speed of the PowerPoint or music. Are there simple dance steps, actions or Makaton/BSL signs that would enhance people's understanding and enable people to join in?

Will sharing simple percussion instruments enhance the worship? Invite people to share worship music from their culture, in their heart language, from other experiences of worship (even school assemblies!) that they think will bless the congregation.

All are welcome to pray

It is great to ask the youngest and oldest person present to pray before the service (together with the elder responsible) for the person leading worship or preaching – it will bless them and remind them of the diversity of those they are ministering to.

We have created sets of Prayer Prompt Cards for 4-8s and 8-12s. One side is a simple image or photograph that might prompt prayer, the other side is a simple prayer with Widgit symbols to aid accessibility, and on the older set a Bible verse and prayer starter words 'thanks', 'sorry' and 'please' – order a free pack from **children.youth@urc.org.uk** or download from **bit.ly/Child-prayer-cards**. These can be used in different ways to enable children and others to lead prayers or participate in group prayer.



Prayer stations enable all ages to engage in more sensory prayer and simple ritual. Giving people enough time to choose what they engage with and for how long is important, as is encouraging all ages to facilitate each other's engagement. Remember others may find ways to use the materials provided that are different than originally envisaged, but equally valid! Simple activities, such as inviting people to share something they are thankful for, sorry about, or that concerns them by writing, drawing, thought shower, via technology (such as a Mentimeter link accessed on mobile phones) to form a word cloud – these can enable a prayer leader or team to craft prayers within the service which draw on the contributions of all ages. Hearing your pet mentioned by name or everyone giving thanks for a particular favourite food of yours during the prayers can be very powerful, reinforcing that you and your prayers matter within this church.

For regular prayers, you might include accessible versions using Widgit symbols or accompany them with Makaton signing. If people speak a variety of languages, you could include prayers in their first tongue, language spoken at home or

heart language. Or people could be encouraged to say the Lord's Prayer in the language they feel most comfortable speaking, so a variety of languages are spoken together.

All are welcome to share the Bible

How the Word of God is presented tends to reflect what people are asked to do. If someone is given a passage and asked to read it – generally we get a read passage. If a couple of people are given a passage and asked to prepare sharing it, we may get all sorts of things as creativity is unlocked. A reading shared between voices; a dramatised reading; an illustrated reading using PowerPoint or objects; a reading with congregational participation. If the people preparing are of different ages, then what they prepare will probably be accessible by different ages. Whatever happens, those preparing the reading will have engaged with it more deeply together, and shared their different perspective on the reading, and some intergenerational sharing will be a by-product of the process.

Helping everyone be IN the Bible story or passage in some way deepens engagement and enables everyone to contribute to understanding it. Ask people to listen to the reading in the shoes of one of the characters and then share how that character feels or responds at different points (you can always add in God and the Devil as characters in every story!) Invite people to improvise a tableau or mime of the story as it is read – you can have a simple set ready (eg, chairs and cardboard box to make a boat) or use the Whoosh! approach where people improvise and become key objects or characters as the story unfolds (**bit.ly/WhooshBible**). Alternatively, invite people to close their eyes and imagine a scene or use a Lectio Divina type approach to dwelling in the word and invite people to share what strikes them from the passage. If it is a well-known passage, try a remembered Bible approach where everyone adds to recreating it from their memory.

All are welcome to teach and learn

Teaching lands when it connects with the learners. Traditionally teachers try to build these

connections between the content and the intended recipients, but this is very difficult when we are trying to connect with a wide range of people across the ages and stages of life.

An alternative approach is to find ways to explore the content together, inviting everyone to find meaningful connection to their situations, experiences, and existing understandings and to share these with each other. Open wondering questions, within in a setting that welcomes all responses and reflections, can be very helpful. Giving people space to reflect and explore in the ways they prefer to learn through options to discuss, use art materials, dig into their own wider research with resources, write, construct (for instance with Lego) either on their own or with others – these are methods which help everyone learn. Following on from this, facilitating a way of sharing enables everyone to teach. It does require some skill to hear where God has taken each individual in their exploring and affirm how God might be speaking to another, but when modelled well this soon becomes a shared practice as, for instance, children compliment adults on their drawings and adults are encouraged through the questions and poems crafted by children. The mutually enriching experience becomes precious to all.

All are welcome to give testimony

Everyone has a story to share of where God is at work in their life and where they encounter God in the world. Find ways to encourage all ages to share these stories with those they are sitting next to, a small group, or the whole church. You could celebrate birthdays and other key life transition moments (like becoming a grandparent) and invite people to share stories from their experience. Or why not have a ‘this time tomorrow...’ slot when different people are encouraged to say what they will be doing this time tomorrow, and prayed for as God’s ambassadors in those places and activities? As worship draws to an end, you might invite a couple of different generations to share where and how God drew close to them, or they were able to draw close to God within the service you have just shared together. This enables people to appreciate that different aspects of the worship might be these moments of connection for different people in different ways.

Conclusion

When God’s people gather, everyone brings a gift, and everyone leaves with a blessing. Intergenerational worship that has been co-created by the different generations enables this to be a reality. Every small step in this direction is important and part of a journey towards being a church that warmly welcomes all.

Remembered Bible

Janet Lees is a former URC school chaplain and speech and language therapist, and a member of the Lay Community of St Benedict. Her books *Word of Mouth: Using the remembered Bible for building community* and *Tell Me the Stories of Jesus: A companion to the remembered gospel* detail an approach developed by Janet in her ministry in churches and with all ages and abilities, and especially in more deprived areas. The concept focuses on communal oral storytelling, the way Bible stories would originally have been shared before reading and writing became more universally established. The books are available from ionabooks.com.

When a group of people remember a story together, it connects them to one another and to the story being told, enabling them to connect it to their own lives and lived experience. A Bible study where no written Bibles are used and the group contribute their own recollections of what the story involves can produce new meaning and relevance and can draw everyone in at whatever level is appropriate for them. It is important that everyone is encouraged not to worry too much about ‘right or wrong’, but to throw themselves into contributing and listening to one another, working collaboratively to reach a version they can share. It can be good to have someone ‘scribing’ the story visually in pictures as the group agrees on what to include. People can share bits of their own story as it resonates with them. Sometimes it will work just to explore the story together, especially with the more widely known stories. Sometimes prompts and questions might be useful to get people going. In her book, Janet gives examples of each. The approach, based on pedagogical foundations, helps people engage with the Bible on a more personal level and to share with one another in community.

all are welcome, and it DOESN'T HAVE to BE indoors

Outdoor church offers a sensory experience which creates a connection with the Creator God. It expands our understanding of 'God-in-all-things and all-things-in-God', how we engage with and our relationship with God and nature. It offers significant opportunities to worship together as a church family of all ages and stages. Whether it's on a beach, or by a river, in a field, on your high street, in a wooded area, in a playground or in the church grounds, being outside as we worship and explore together is a fabulous all-year-round opportunity. You could offer a one-off outside worship experience or consider beginning a new ministry regularly meeting outside. There are certain principles which are useful to be mindful of when thinking about outdoor church:

Leave the space as you found it: encourage your group to be gentle and leave little or no footprint in the area used.

Be in the space, don't try and make it like 'normal' church: awareness of the place you are in is important. Worship can be shorter, informal and more inclusive. Meet in the round or go for meditative walks. This isn't normal church so use the space you have creatively.

Go with the seasons of nature: the church seasons and the natural world are linked, use them within your worship, eg, the incarnation, the Light of the World, is celebrated just after the winter solstice, so the days have become fractionally longer. Easter, resurrection and rebirth comes in spring. By embracing this, we can explore the deeper connection the church calendar and nature's timings have.

Keep it manageable: what is the group size and what space do you have available? Think about road noise, neighbours and other users of the outdoor space, those who are playing or people who are coming to tend graves if you are using a graveyard.

Be sure that we are not taking from nature without giving back: there needs to be a balance of what we do in worship and in our daily lives with respect of the environment. How does our worship encourage us to live differently every day?

Have fun, but be respectful of others. Be respectful to others in how you act and what you say. We want to encourage everyone to enjoy themselves and be aware of each other in the space. Being outside can be helpful to those who find being in buildings difficult due to their individual needs, but be aware of how useful the space is for those with other needs, eg, consider if the space and access is wheelchair user friendly. If you are leading a reflective session, choose a space with minimal sensory disturbances.

Find the right space: look around and consider which spaces might be useful to meet in, consider how you mark out boundaries and keep people safe, always remember to do site visits as part of your planning of sessions (you will be surprised how much one space can change and offer new opportunities to explore over time). Some forest churches move around and use different spaces for each time together.

Use silences far more: listen and watch for the presence of God in the world around you.

Allow the place itself and the Holy Spirit to lead you: relax and enjoy yourselves. Explore, pile sticks, look for signs of life and have fun. Encourage mindfulness, sharing experiences with each other, and creating artwork with found materials. If you are leading a trail around a churchyard, consider whether to look at memorials or nature (or both), remember to tread lightly and be aware of dangers, eg, trip hazards, overgrown areas and unstable monuments.

You are visiting other species' homes, so treat it with respect: take care not to disturb any wildlife habitats you may encounter.


There's no such thing as the wrong weather, only the wrong clothes. Sturdy footwear is a must, as the outdoors can be uneven, slippery and mucky! Always be careful, especially if you are leading a group.

Resources for outdoor worship


- GreenHeart Education graces and prayers: www.greenhearted.org/prayers-for-the-earth.html
- Engage Worship ideas for outdoor worship stations: www.engageworship.org/ideas/outdoor-worship-stations
- The Faraday Institute resources: www.faraday.cam.ac.uk/churches/church-resources/posts/resources-for-outdoor-worship
- Engage Worship ideas for outdoor prayer stations: www.engageworship.org/ideas/outdoor-worship-garden-prayer-stations
- Mossy Church has a training video on meeting Jesus in messy play and mud kitchens: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHdZaVgGTNw
- Mossy Church Facebook: www.facebook.com/mossychurch
- Wild Church Network: www.wildchurchnetwork.com
- Muddy Church has a wealth of resources: www.muddychurch.co.uk

Talk with your Synod CYDO or equivalent if you would like support in exploring this form of ministry and find out what other churches nearby are already practising and go along for a visit.


all are WELCOME – using words


 Widgit is an  online word processor  designed to make  written  communication

 easier to read  and  more  accessible.  Visual  cues  help  the reader  to decode

 the writing. It  could  be  used  for church  and  notices,  service

 sheets,  hymns  and  prayers,  letters,  newsletters  and  more.  Your  Synod  office

 and  Church  House  have  licences  for the  program  or  you can  buy  one  from

 widgitonline.com.  Training  is  available  from  Church  House  or  your  Synod  Office.

Using Widgit to help make the written word more welcoming

Have you ever thought about how many different ways we use writing in our churches? We expect everyone to have a certain level of literacy, even though we know that's not the case. Young children who can't read, refugees with English as a foreign language, children and adults with additional needs, even folk who have forgotten their reading glasses – all may need a little extra support.

Activity one

Walk around your church building and see how many different examples of writing you can spot. Think about who this information is aimed at.



Activity two

Talk together about what information should be accessible to everyone, although you will not be able to put everything into symbols. For example, you may not be able to give all the words for a song, but you could give the symbols for the chorus. It may not be necessary for everybody in the congregation to read the full safeguarding policy, but it is important that they know who to talk to if there's a problem, so you could display a safeguarding poster using Widgit. Perhaps it would be unwieldy to display the whole Bible reading in Widgit, but could you display a key verse or text? And consider which bits of the church newsletter you could put symbols with.

Prayer



Spirit of God, at Pentecost you enabled your disciples to spread the message of your love to each person present in a way that they would understand.

Help us to use our communication in the same way.

Whether through our words, our facial expression, our body language, May we invite people in, not close them out;

Meet people where they are, not make them feel inferior or excluded;

Build people up, not boost ourselves;

Share a welcome, not build a wall.

In every interaction today, may we communicate your love. Amen.

Supporting use of spoken and written language and communication in church

You will almost certainly recognise the prayer in the yellow box on this page, but try reading it as though you had never seen or heard it before. What does it actually mean?

Activity one

Try underlining the words in it that are not everyday language. How many are there? Try writing the same prayer in words that might be understood by a five-year-old, a ten-year-old, someone with English as a foreign language and someone with a communication disability. We use a lot of language in church that can exclude people just by the fact that it is unfamiliar to them. In fact, if we are truly honest, how much church jargon is not really meaningful to many people in the congregation?



Activity two

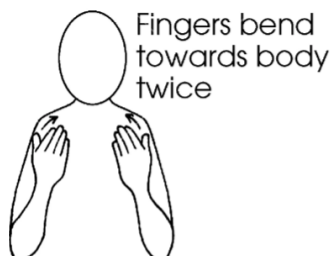
Try to explain, in words of one syllable, the meaning of these phrases: redemption, salvation, substitutionary atonement, catholic and apostolic church, priesthood of all believers. Many people may struggle with verbal communication in general – some everyday words and phrases may be difficult to process, especially in context when someone is speaking. This is where Makaton comes in.

Activity three

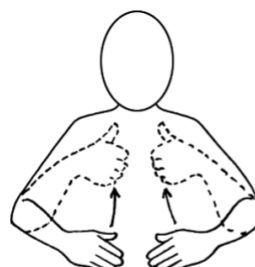
Try these signs:



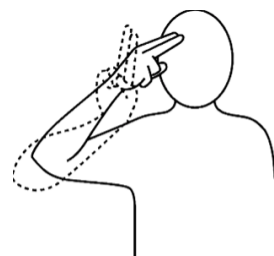
Hello



Welcome



How are you?



Name

Makaton is a communication programme using symbols (pictures), signs (gestures) and speech to enable people to communicate. It supports the development of essential communication skills and aids accessibility. This helps provide extra clues about what someone is saying. It is related to British Sign Language – if you use BSL you may recognise some of the signs – but the signs are used alongside speech and in spoken word order, mainly focusing on the key words in the sentence, and uses a limited vocabulary range, often supported by deliberate use of body language. Today, many children and adults use Makaton symbols and signs and it is taught in many schools. Perhaps it is worth introducing in our churches, even if it is initially only for some of the songs we sing and prayers we use regularly, or to greet people and offer them a biscuit!

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy name

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done

On Earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory

For ever and ever,

Amen



all are welcome – RESOURCES FROM URC CHILDREN'S and YOUTH WORK

All are welcome to the Holiday Club resources.

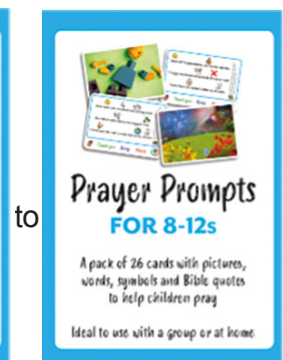
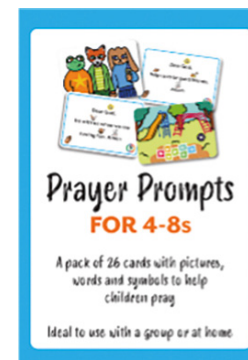
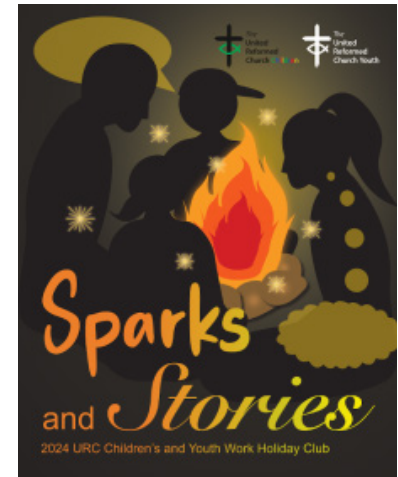
Why not run your holiday club as a vintage holiday club, holiday-at-home or vintage Messy Church for the older members of your congregation or community? Our resources include tailor-made activities for the elderly and for a dementia café. Or why not organise an intergenerational event where all generations can engage with the theme together? Again, the resources are developed with this option in mind. With ideas for teens and for toddlers and babies as well as the usual 5-11 age range, the URC holiday club materials have something for everyone: bit.ly/URC-holidayclub.

Children and those with communication difficulties may find it difficult to lead prayer without some form of prompt, but the free prayer prompt cards from URC Children's and Youth Work are ideal encourage those first steps in leading others in prayer. With engaging pictures, everyday words, and Widgit symbols, together with linked Bible verses in the 8-12s pack, they provide a great resource for both individuals and groups. Available from the Children's and Youth Work office: children.youth@urc.org.uk

Working as part of a team from the Children's Ministry Network (part of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) and in partnership with ROOTS for Churches, we have produced a free guide for churches to help explore ways of building strong relationships with local schools by offering hospitality for school visits. Find it here: bit.ly/CMN-schoolvisits.

You can download accessible posters to ensure everyone has access to important information:

- Infant feeding policy: bit.ly/4khb4Gg
- New updated accessible safeguarding posters: bit.ly/3EWQCKL.



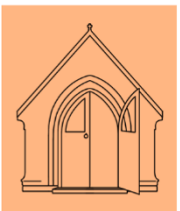
Guide for hosting a school visit to your church

Introduction

While not all churches may have children worshipping among the congregation on a Sunday morning, most churches have children and schools in their local community. This guide suggests ways to build and strengthen the relationship between your church and local schools by hosting educational visits or services, and offers other suggestions of how to build meaningful connection between the Church and school.

Our church buildings and people are a God-given resource and there are many opportunities to use these assets to meet the needs of visiting school groups.

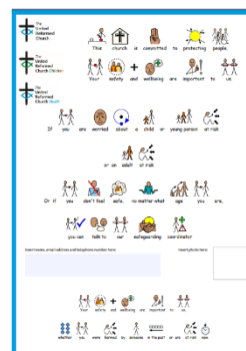
No two churches are alike, even within the same denomination. The aim of this guide is to be adaptable to whatever your situation and setting – take from it what fits.



Contents

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1. Getting started – Building a relationship with your local school	2
2. Connecting with the school curriculum	3
3. Drawing out the significance and meaning of things children will see	5
4. Explaining worship practices in your church	6
5. Other opportunities to use your building to engage with schools	8
6. Conclusion and credits	10

Throughout this resource, we offer a wealth of ideas and suggestions for how your church can connect with your local school. We pray that as you read and reflect, God inspires you to grow or embark on a fresh ministry which bears fruit in myriad ways. Have a notebook and pen at the ready, to jot down what springs to mind for your local context. Be respectful of what God is calling you to do and be.





Faith Adventures: Children Together and Youth Resource

Faith Adventures: A free weekly resource enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus together in the home, church and beyond.

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link: urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf

Galatians 3:27-29 – ‘Putting on Christ’

Theme: We are all unique but equal in God’s eyes

Introduction

What would be helpful to know in my planning?

Paul had founded the churches in Galatia and so wrote this letter to them as someone who knew them well. He was travelling off on his first missionary journey to Asia Minor. He had heard that the congregations in Galatia were falling into bad ways and that they were split. Some followed leaders who taught that the law of Moses meant God’s grace was just for the Jewish people and only those who obeyed the law. Other leaders recognised that Jesus had brought a new promise of grace that was for Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) alike – all who accepted God’s grace would receive it, they did not have to earn it or be a certain type of person.

Paul compared accepting God’s grace as being like ‘putting on Jesus’ like we put on our clothes. Just like when we put on our school uniform we can be identified as belonging to our school and even representing our school. This can raise the question ‘if we can put on Jesus like clothing, can we take that clothing off?’ This could be a good starting point for discussion in your group and some interesting ideas may emerge. It may also lead to discussion about whether ‘putting on Christ’ changes what we look like on the outside or whether it’s just an internal change, and whether it’s important to wear particular things to show we’re a Christian, like wearing a cross etc. Be careful not to impose your thoughts on the children, but to allow them to explore what the message of this passage means to them. The important part of this passage is to realise that it’s OK to be different – you don’t have to be the same as everyone else or as they expect you to be – you are equal in Christ. And so is everyone else.

Remember that different children may have different experience and understanding of baptism. They may have been baptised or not. Some families and congregations will practice infant baptism and some will practice adult baptism. Some may use dedication or thanksgiving services in the place of infant baptism. You may want to read this: urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-believe. This presents a concise explanation of the difference if you are not sure. The important thing is not to impose your beliefs on the children and to respect both, both being practised within the United Reformed Church.

Together

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend

(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,

(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,

(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better,

(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family

(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three 'steps' as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN

(two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.

Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.

Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,

Adventuring together with you wherever we may go.

Amen.

Youth resource, gathering prayer

All mighty God,

Be with us as we learn more about you through stories and people in the Bible.

Help us to walk in your way and follow your path.

Be with us as we make decisions that affect our lives, and the lives of those around us.

Amen

In-person game

Clothed with ...

You will need:

- bag of assorted dressing up clothes (eg hats, silly glasses, scarfs etc)
- a source of music that can be stopped at random and restarted.

What you do:

1. Just as with 'Pass The Parcel', everyone sits in a circle and passes the bag of dressing up clothes from person to person while the music plays.
2. When the music stops, the person holding the bag pulls out one item without looking and has to put that item on.
3. When the music starts again, pass the bag one again. No winner, but everyone should have lots of fun!

Experience

For this story, we recommend using the New Century Version:

www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+3%3A27-29&version=NCV.

Where can I find the story online?

God's Story: Galatians: youtu.be/LrzbssH-cBU.

Songs to support the story:

Big Family of God: Remix with Actions and Lyrics, by Nick and Becky Drake:

youtu.be/Rawq3usrzsE.

Youth resource, watch and listen

Song: *Something Inside So Strong*

Labi Siffre version: youtu.be/7B-4Lsrx8IA?si=4NfZcUW0Foi8veH_

Flying Pickets version: youtu.be/XHCziDaioxc?si=Z-2MIH30DIV_LsaB.

Explore

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A way to explore the story

Starter task

Begin by asking the group to draw a self-portrait showing all the things that make them them – their individual identity.

Spot the similarities

Before the session, encourage everyone to bring one thing in, anything at all. The more random the better and put all the items on the group table. Gather round and have a look at the items. Explain that it's obvious that all these things are different, but in what way are they all the same? Encourage the group to come up with as many different ways the items are the same, where is the commonality?

Once you have had some time doing this task, lay the self-portraits onto the table and ask the group to consider what God sees – the passage tells us that the gender, age and background of each person is not important, that we are all equal (the same) to God. Ask the group to offer suggestions of how we are all the same.

This is a good opportunity to ask the group whether they believe they, as a group and as individuals, are equal in church – if so, how? If not, why not? What would our church look like if we did see us all as equal? You could share these ideas with the wider church.

Youth resource alternative

Fast fashion

How ethical are the clothes we buy? Watch and discuss the short video clips below:

- Can fashion be sustainable? BBC Earth – youtu.be/ZoiU8sprXpQ?si=4Ox-fFA2VfJCylmh
- Stacey Dooley Investigates fast fashion – youtu.be/zOe_M3GutdY?si=ygARj_5wftOJz-Ut.

Research

Use the website www.goodonyou.eco to find out more about how ethical different shops and brands are. Search different brands using the 'brand rating' tool near the top right of the sight. How do the brands that you normally purchase rank? Which brands are ranked most ethical?

Exploring further

Check out the free 'Justice X Together' resource pack from Tearfund. Session two focuses on the topic of 'Fast Fashion'. Download the resource at www.wearetearfund.org/justicextogether.

In your opinion, should the clothes we choose to wear be linked to our faith in any way? What do the clothes we wear tell others about us, and does it matter? Is it anyone's business what we choose to wear?

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too.

- *A Little Bit Different* by Claire Alexander, read by Petway Elementary school: youtu.be/x9xSUu0ldQI?si=U64ogsrVZKfXTN4Y.

Talking together

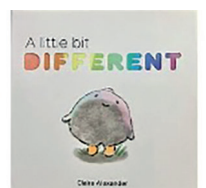
How might we talk about the story together?

- I wonder what it means to be clothed in Christ? How would people see a difference?
- Can you think of a time when you feel equal? What is that like? What about a time when you don't feel equal?
- Where do you see inequality around the world? Is there anything we can do in response to that?

Wondering together

Suggested questions to use during activities:

- I wonder what your favourite outfit is and why?
- I wonder what it's like being the favourite? Or not the favourite?
- I wonder if you've ever gone somewhere wearing the wrong thing – eg forgotten PE kit, slightly different uniform, fancy dress, forgot about non-uniform day?



What's in the box

(For under fives). Use the special box or bag and sing 'What's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag' (to the tune of *The Farmer's in the Dell*). You could tap the top of the box twice after the word 'box'. Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- a selection of uniform hats (what we wear gives people an idea about what we do and who we are)
- some costume jewellery – including a cross (we can choose to wear accessories/symbols that tell people something about us – what do you like to wear?)
- pictures of rainbows (we are told that being part of Jesus' family means we are included in God's promise – what promise?)

- a selection of baptism gifts (baptism shawl, baptism spoon, etc – what does it mean to be baptised?)
- a mirror (we are all unique but loved equally by God – what is unique about you?)
- a set of play people to act out the story or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (eg stones, felt, twigs etc).

Youth resource alternatives

Video

- *What Is Equality?* (3'39"): youtu.be/V7gX1PRgDRA?si=jpHNBILEYPWYBfng
- Trailer for *Mitchells vs the Machines*: youtu.be/_ak5dFt8Ar0?si=AlcSdVWRD7lrM4vu.

Talking together

Going deeper

- If you've not been baptised in church, does that mean you're not baptised in Christ – are they linked?
- The differences in the Bible passage are set in time and context – what differences do we have in current context that divides people?
- What does 'protected characteristics' mean? If you look at this passage, what is missing from the list of protected characteristics we recognise today? How might you re-write this passage?
- If we're clothed with Christ, how should we view others?

Conversation starters

- What do we wear that identifies us as Christians? Do we need anything? Is it the reason we wear something that's important?
- What is the difference between equality and equity?

Express

Praying together – how can you involve the children actively in prayer?

'All of you are one in Christ Jesus' Galatians 3:28

It is good to talk to God about everything that we are feeling, our concerns for the world, for others and for ourselves, and to give praise and thanks to God for all the good things in our lives.

You will need:

- string
- two paper/plastic plates or cups
- coat hanger
- some objects to act as weights.

What you do:

1. Cut six pieces of string each the same length.
2. Tie three pieces together with a knot at both ends.
3. Attach one end of the string to the coat hanger and, at the other end, spread the string to support the plate or cup.
4. Repeat for the other side of the hanger. Make sure that the knot is in the middle of the cup or plate and spread the string evenly. You can hang the balance scales from a washing line outside or someone can hold the hanger over their finger to allow the scales to balance.



5. Take it in turns to add a 'weight' to the scales as you pray. Try to always keep the scales balanced. Holding your 'weight', talk to God about the things that do not see fair or equal in the world.
6. Add your weight prayer to the scale and the next person adds their prayer to the scale the other side at the same time to keep the scales balanced. As an alternative, take a weight and say prayers of thanks, praise and blessing and add it to one side of the scales. On the other side, add your prayers of things that worry and concern you and things you are sorry for.

Spoken prayer

St Patrick's Breastplate

Use actions with this Celtic prayer of protection, remembering the words of Galatians... 'we are clothed with Christ'. Encourage the children to come up with the actions.

Christ be with me,	Christ beneath me,
Christ within me.	Christ above me,
Christ behind me,	Christ in quiet,
Christ before me.	Christ in danger.
Christ beside me,	Christ in hearts of all that love me.
Christ to win me.	Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
Christ to comfort and restore me.	

Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond. See here for more suggestions:

www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf.

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

Making activity

Craftivism

Craftivism is when you use craft to create something to encourage people to think about injustice or motivate others to look for effecting change in society. You can find out more here:

bit.ly/craftivism-pins.

Encourage your group to create something that will motivate thought and action in others around the issues of inequality. What has got your group going ... what would they like to address and encourage others to think about? Then get creative, you could make a poster or an installation that makes your point to others.

Gingerbread People

You will need:

- some pre-made Gingerbread shapes – you can buy or make these in advance. Here is a recipe to help you:
www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/ultimate-easy-gingerbread
- icing pens
- icing sugar
- any decorations you wish.



What you do:

1. You need to either make or buy pre-made gingerbread people.
2. Ask the children to all create an identical gingerbread person using the writing icing and decorations (they will have to work hard as a team to achieve this) and then create one completely unique gingerbread person that is unlike anyone else's in the group.
3. You will end up with lots of gingerbread people who look the same (in Christ) and lots who are the same inside but look different on the outside. When we put on Christ, we all become like Christ. We are all unique and its ok and actually important to be different, but with Jesus we all have something which is the same in us.

Youth Resource alternative

Equality versus equity

Take a look at the words below taken from the introduction to the American Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Preamble to the Declaration of Independence

- How equal do you think past and current society is in the USA?
- How do you think this compares to society in the UK and elsewhere?

Look at the picture (available to download from bit.ly/43dumq2).

- What are your thoughts on this image?
- What do you think is the meaning of this metaphor?
- What could the boxes represent?
- What could the fence represent?
- What might be some of the limits or challenges within this metaphor?

Exploring further

The team at 'centre for story based strategy' have produced resources to further explore the equality and equity model, creating discussions by expanding the image to include a third and fourth box. Images, workshop resources and a mobile game can be downloaded at: www.storybasedstrategy.org/the4thbox.

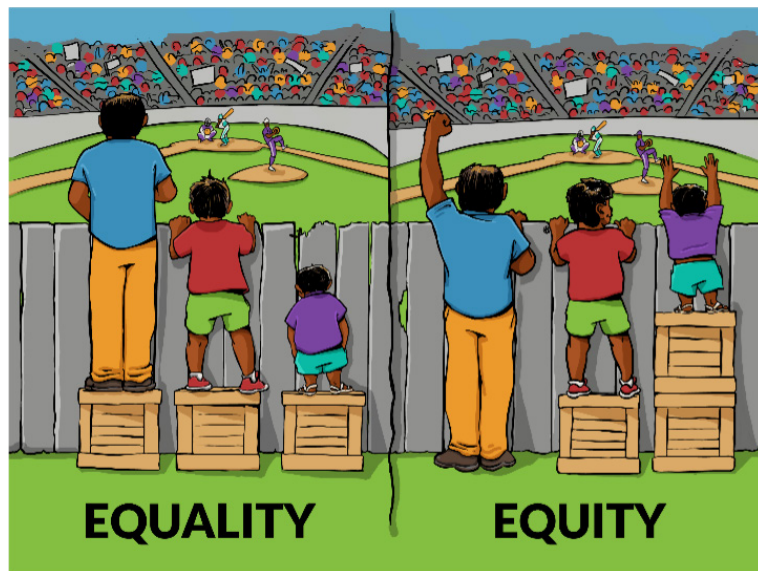


Image credit: Interaction Institute for Social Change interactioninstitute.org | Artist: Angus Maguire. Madewithangus.com

The UN Convention on the rights of the child

Take a look at this poster from UNICEF which uses child friendly language to introduce the main articles of the rights of the child. bit.ly/rights-of-child-poster.

- Which of the numbered articles stand out to you? Why?
- Can you think of examples of positive steps that have been taken to help meet specific rights?
- Can you think of examples of where we may fail to meet specific rights? What could be done about this?

Everyday with Jesus

Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- You've heard of rose-tinted spectacles, where you try to see everything in a positive light? Try to look at people around you this week with 'God-tinted spectacles', seeing not their differences but the fact that they are valued by God. Does it change the way you treat them?
- As you go about your daily life, notice what things you find easy and what things you find difficult. Compare this list with a friend. In what ways do you complement each other and how could you support each other?

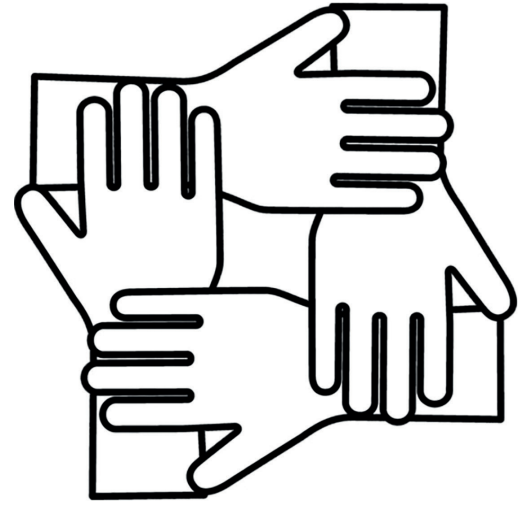


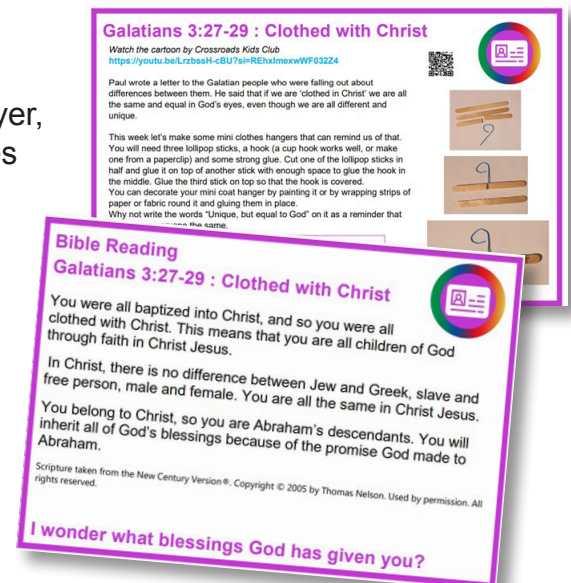
Illustration from www.supercoloring.com/coloring-pages/diversity
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Youth resource challenge

Discipleship doesn't stop when you walk out of the church door – it is a part of everyday life. Take a challenge with you and try to make it part of your week. You may think of your own suggestion of what you as an individual or a group might do in the coming week in response to what you have explored today? If not here are some suggestions:

- Use one of the 'conversation starter' questions or the question below to talk with someone of a different generation or from a different setting and share your questions, thoughts, insights together: How would the world be different if everyone was treated equally?
- Research something suggested by JPIT Resources (jpit.uk) or Commitment For Life (urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/commitment-for-life)
- Create a vision/mood board for the week ahead, fill it with things that help to motivate and shape who you are.

Also available for 5-11s, a postcard home with activities, prayer, reading, wondering questions and video to share with families during the week. Find them online with the weekly materials.



Faith Adventures free weekly resource for 0 to 14s

Find it on: bit.ly/FACT_resource

MORE THAN JUST WORDS!

Psalm 51:7

You know, God...
I struggle with so much of what I have been taught –
When I hear the words ‘washed and made
whiter than snow’,
When my heart is grieved by the equating of
darkness with evil,
And my soul aches at the linking of
blackness with sin.

Some people tell me I am wrong.
They take offence at me finding offence.
They tell me it’s not literal.
They tell me it’s in the Bible –
though I have not found where sin is named as black!
They tell me the Bible is God’s word –
and ask who am I to question God?

Loving God, I am ‘me’ –
The child you created in your own image,
Equally loved and equally precious
As all your children.

Yet, because of the skin which none of
us could choose,
Some find themselves regarded as ‘less’ –
Less worthy. Less capable. Less competent.
Less beautiful. Less lovable. Less human?
Less deserving of dignity. Less deserving of life?

Lord, those words, that imagery,
Have been used for too long
To justify and uphold such foolishness.
Such evil.

So I don’t want to be washed and made
whiter than snow,
And I won’t accept that black is the colour of sin.
Remind all your children that we are all
your children –
And we are equally beloved in your sight.

Karen Campbell



Further resources from URC Children’s and Youth Work

Bags of Welcome

A new leaflet, packed with suggestions and ideas for creating welcome bags for children and others coming to your church.

Coming in the all-church mailing in April and additional copies available from your CYDO+, or from children.youth@urc.org.uk. Also available as a free download on: bit.ly/URCCYWpaperwork.

Visit bit.ly/URCCYWpaperwork to find documents on quiet spaces, social stories to support people with additional needs, and tips and practical advice for the support of transgender and non-binary young people in church settings. Information on safer recruitment and guidelines for completing risk assessments can also be found using this link.

all are welcome – WHATEVER OUR NEEDS

Three activities that can be used together as part of an approach to ensuring everyone can participate, regardless of ability or disability.

We recommend talking to disabled people first and centring their perspectives and experiences, for example involve disabled participants in your church community in the planning and preparation of these conversations as much as they are comfortable. Even a little bit of involvement in shaping the conversation is preferable to none!

How can you make space to listen to the voices and experiences of disabled people in your all-age spaces? For example, talk from the front, interview, recording, written/visual representation of their views.

If you do not have disabled participants who are comfortable being involved, consider reaching out to local disability action groups, particularly ones run by disabled people, or to **www.throughtheroof.org** which has representatives around the country.

Consider practical exercises where participants can gain some insight into living with a physical or sensory impairment and audit church building and activities for accessibility and obstacles. For example, attending church activities using a wheelchair or blindfolded. We realise that this kind of activity can lead to potentially embarrassing, awkward or absurd situations, and a little laughter is natural. However, it is important to remember that what you are experiencing by willingly taking on a momentary limitation reflects the lived reality of many people who won't be able to hop out of a wheelchair or take a blindfold off, so do try to treat the exercise with the respect it merits.

Living as a disabled person is a complex reality that cannot be fully grasped in a short exercise, but hopefully this will give some practical insight into the obstacles and challenges faced by disabled people looking to participate in the life of your church.

Work together on assembling information and guidance on accessing your church building, services, ministries and other activities.

- How to find the church? Consider postal addresses and website links to maps
- How to get to the church? Consider public transport, bike and car
- How to get to the room in the building or area in the grounds that you are using?
Consider stairs, lifts and any potential obstacles
- Could you make a map of the layout of the church building and grounds?
- How do you join online services? Are there any adjustments that need to be made to make these more accessible?
- Are there people with welcome and signposting roles who can offer guidance and help? Where can these people be found?
- Is there signage to guide people to where they need to go? Is it displayed at a height and in a format that is accessible to everyone?
- Who can people contact if they want to know more or have difficulty accessing any of the information? Could you put this contact at the very beginning of the guidance so that finding the contact isn't a challenge in itself?

- What do people need to know about the space where they are going to participate in an activity or event?
- Are there any accessibility accommodations that they can use? For example, accessible seating, spaces for wheelchairs, hearing aid loops, large print or easy read order-of-services, areas that are lit differently, quiet areas or fidget toys?
- If refreshments are offered, what provision is made for dietary requirements? Should participants let anyone know about their requirements?
- Are there accessible toilets? Where can they be found? Is it possible to leave the meeting space to access them discreetly?
- What do people need to know about the activity or event?
- What will they be expected to do? Consider not only the kind of activities (eg, sing hymn, read Bible passage, listen to sermon), but the underlying activities involved in this (eg, stand to sing, read from PowerPoint). Are these activities accessible to all? What accommodations are made for those who will find these a barrier to participation?
- Will there be space and permission for people to meet any needs they have for movement, refreshment or toilet visits in the course of the event? For example, will there be breaks? Should people feel free to move about if they need to? If not, why not?
- How could you make this document accessible? For example, large print, easy read, video recording, Braille, PDF OCR reader
- Where will you make space for feedback? For example: 'If there's anything we could do to make your experiences more inclusive, let us know'.

It is important to recognise a wide range of accessibility needs. It is unlikely that every possible accessibility need will be represented in your church community, but we encourage you consider as many as possible in order to make your church as accessible as possible.

Watch this video created by a group of young neurodivergent people at Augustine URC as they share what they would like people to know about neurodivergence: youtu.be/KAmBe1Ao63g.

Find out more by exploring the Conversation Starters on Disability on the URC E&L Learning Hub: bit.ly/4hSLjL1.



Prayer



Living God

we come with our mixture of abilities and our limited understanding.

You know how people can be prevented from reaching their potential by expectations of what is 'normal', by the environment not being adapted to their needs,

or by being isolated from support and encouragement.

Help us value each other as you value us.

Help us overcome isolation and prejudice

to belong to your community of hope.

In Jesus we see you being limited by others' reactions

yet bringing life in all its fullness.

In the risen Jesus we see the marks of pain and anguish

but recognise love reaching beyond them.

Help us to know how precious we are to you.

Help us offer ourselves as signs of your love at work in the world.

Through your Spirit that connects and equips us. Amen.

Written by Simon Walkling for Disability Awareness Sunday 2023

EXPLORE and CELEBRATE THE DIFFERENT PEOPLE in OUR COMMUNITIES and HOW all are WELCOMED

Opening questions

- Can you think of a time or place where you have felt welcome?
- What made you feel welcome?

Activity

Special Meals

You will need:

- paper plates
- markers or felt tip pens
- tables and chairs.

What you do:

1. Arrange chairs around a table to simulate a dining room setting.



2. Place paper plates at each seat and invite participants to take a seat. Ask participants to think about their favourite meal and to draw or write about it on their paper plate.
3. Participants should then turn to the person next to them and share about their meal. They could discuss the ingredients, the taste and any special memories or cultural significance associated with the dish.

Discussion

Gather the group to discuss how people found this activity. Here are suggested questions:

- What are some common themes or ingredients that appear in many of the favourite meals?
- Are there any surprising or unique meals that stood out to you?
- Did anyone hear about a food or dish they had never heard of before?
- How do our food preferences reflect our cultural backgrounds or personal experiences?

Dinner party guests

If you could have a meal with any historical or present-day person, who would you choose and why?

Bible reflection

Read Luke 14:7-14, using the EasyEnglish Bible (bit.ly/4hscDQ3). Here are some suggested discussion questions:

- I wonder what this passage says to you about welcome?

- I wonder what this passage tells us about the way we should treat others?
- I wonder who are the marginalised in our churches and society today?
- I wonder who would be welcome around your table?
- I wonder what we can do to be truly welcoming to all?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
We come before you with open hearts,
seeking your guidance and strength.
Help us to embrace our true selves without fear of rejection.
As you welcome us into your family with love and understanding,
help us to welcome others no matter where they come from, or what they look like.
If we are all made in your image, help us to see that in the eyes of others.
May we all find a safe place to belong and feel welcomed.
Amen.
Favour Mogaji, aged 16. High Cross URC.



Stories of welcome

Samuel Opong is 17 years old and has been in the UK for almost two years, after moving from Ghana with his family. He attends Grange Park URC, where he is an active member of the youth group. He is also the church drummer.

"I have felt welcome at school and church, by making friends and finding others with the same interests as me. "

"I experienced welcome at my church when invited to take part in activities, and being asked to be a helper for younger children at the Holiday Club."

"I don't really celebrate things about my culture/heritage except for food. I like different Ghanaian dishes. I enjoy making them and especially eating them!"

"Before coming to the UK, I would have liked to know more about the lifestyle. To prepare me to know how to deal with fear of being attacked in areas where I do not see people like me, compared with how I feel when walking around in Ghana."

"Church welcome needs to include opportunities to get involved in initiatives to meet and chat after church service, in peer groups (sharing computer games). Welcome needs to extend across age groups for wider discussions and have a community emphasis."

Pat Poinen is first-generation Windrush arrival from Trinidad in 1970. Pat is a Racial Justice Advocate for Northern Synod, a core member of Cascades of Grace, and an Equalities Activist. Pat dedicated 43 years to the NHS as a registered Nurse, Midwife and Health Visitor and a further five years as a FE College Lecturer.

"I was 19 when I came here. My reason for coming was to train as a nurse, following a call from UK due to a shortage of people to work in the hospitals. I came to a town in the North of England called Harrogate. Because we were in hospital accommodation and there were mostly foreign nurses, we were looked after quite well. The work was another story, the hours were long

(42 hours a week), and the pay was poor. My first wage was £28 for the month. Incidentally, it was pre-decimalisation, which was difficult as we had to learn about sixpence, three penny, guinea etc. I would say that I did not experience the same level of racism and poverty experienced by others of my generation for jobs and housing. I hated being here! I was so homesick I just wanted to go back home to my family. I was in unfamiliar surroundings, and I had never worked in my life."

"I had never experienced racism in my country, we were all different backgrounds, but it didn't matter to us growing up in Trinidad. We had people of Indian, African, Chinese, mixed heritage, and Europeans. Here, I experienced racism for the first time because of the colour of my skin. I did not know about the bland food we had to eat in the canteen and no idea about the weather and the length of light and darkness. I had no idea of a church where I could worship."

"Churches should ensure that they make connections with hospitals and other places where foreigners are working or studying. Give times of services and activities. Arrange an event and invite the 'others' to join in. Really welcome people, not lip service. Always follow up with communication, and offer food, real food!"

"I celebrate our colloquial language. The vernacular and the interpretation of the words and phrases. I like to share our music and remind people that the steelpan is the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is the land of Calypso, which is a form of storytelling predating Reggae and Soca. I cannot speak of music without mentioning Carnival. Amid a hostile welcome, Trinidadian Human Rights Activist Claudia Jones organised an indoor Caribbean carnival in 1959. She wanted to hold an event that brought people together and celebrated Caribbean culture. This is seen as the start of the Notting Hill Carnival. I also love to celebrate our food. The melting pot of different cultures mixing food to create Trini food, such as, roti, doubles, coo coo, sancoche, callaloo (spinach soup, different from Jamaican callaloo), crab and dumplings, which is famous in Tobago. In Trinidad and Tobago, the people are kind and friendly. Hospitality and welcome are extended to all, no matter how rich or poor you are."

Questions for discussion:

- What are your thoughts about these stories of welcome?
- How do they compare with other stories of welcome we may have heard about via social media?
- In what ways does your Church offer welcome to others?
- What might you and your church do to further create a welcoming environment?

Windrush videos

For younger children:

- *Black History for Kids: The Windrush Generation*, Little Crowns Storyhouse: youtu.be/uzkY01KZ8iM
- *Bedtime Stories: David Olusoga reads Coming to England*, CBeebies: youtu.be/8Wmvk4RJ8dA

For older children:

- *What is the Windrush Generation?*, BBC Newsround: youtu.be/Si3IRAPJkkU

For teens plus:

- *Windrush 75: What is it and why do we celebrate it?*, The Independent: youtu.be/ldzUfwt3TEY

Additional reading for children and young people

- *Black and British Focus On Children*, David Olusoga
- *What is Race? Who are Racists? Why Does Skin Colour Matter? And Other Big Questions*, Claire Heuchan and Nikesh Shukla
- *This Book is Anti-racist: 20 Lessons On How To Wake Up, Take Action And Do The Work*, Tiffany Jewell
- *Windrush Child*, Benjamin Zephaniah
- *Coming to England*, Floella Benjamin
- *Small's Big Dream*, Manjeet Mann
- *Noughts & Crosses*, Malorie Blackman
- *Stay in Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible*, Yomi Adegoke and Elizabeth Uviebinené
- *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernadine Evaristo

Interfaith dialogue

Interfaith dialogue helps us build relationships and welcome others by breaking down stereotypes and fostering understanding. By engaging with people of different faiths, we can discover common ground and work together to address shared challenges.

You could explore local interfaith groups or initiatives in your community.

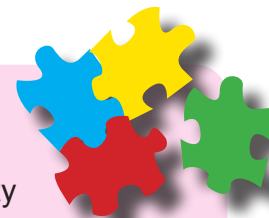
- The Inter Faith Network's poster shows examples of the Golden Rule from different religions as an example of shared values: www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/shared-values-golden-rule
- The Feast provides opportunities for interfaith connection and dialogue: www.thefeast.org.uk/resources

Did you know?

At the 2022 General Assembly, the URC adopted a statement of Confession and Apology concerning the role of our antecedent bodies in transatlantic slavery, and our complicity with the continuing legacies today. Find out more about the URC Legacies of Slavery work here: www.urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/legacies-of-slavery. During 2024, 161 URC personnel underwent anti-racist training, after a commitment made by General Assembly 2023. The URC is a member of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), which helps churches work together for peace and justice. Check out the resources: www.jpit.uk/issues/asylum-and-migration/endhostility. The HMT Windrush was not the first ship to carry people from the Caribbean to England.

Activities

- Host an International Day for your church and local community
- Exchange recipes with someone from a different culture to yourself
- Encourage your church to host an international meal
- Encourage your church to learn a different song/hymn from a minoritised culture represented in your church
- Host a cultural show and tell. Ask participants to bring an object or picture that represents their culture and share its significance with the group
- Organise a language exchange – teach phrases in a variety of different languages
- Celebrate Windrush Day (22 June) by going for a meal at a Caribbean restaurant
- Visit a museum, exhibition or archive to learn about one of the cultures represented in your church or community.



all are welcome – LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Who is my neighbour?

Read Luke 10:25-37.

Questions for discussion:

- What does loving your neighbour mean to you?
- We're going to talk about different forms of discrimination and disadvantages people face
- What do you think being anti-racist looks like in practice? How can we be good neighbours to people of different races and ethnicities to us? **Antiracism is the active effort to identify, challenge, and dismantle racism and its systems. It goes beyond simply avoiding racist beliefs, aiming for a more equitable society for all racial and ethnic groups**
- Do you know any LGBTQIA+ people? What kind of issues do they face? How can we be good neighbours to them? **The 'plus' in LGBTQIA+ represents a broad spectrum of sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions beyond the specific letters listed. It includes various identities, such as pansexual, genderqueer, non-binary and many others, acknowledging the diversity within the community. It is important to keep this in mind when we consider the challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community, and to consider that those identities that have less recognition and representation may find themselves excluded and marginalised even in spaces where all are meant to be welcome**
- What kind of issues do neurodivergent people face? How can we be good neighbours to them? **Neurodivergence is about understanding and affirming the specific ways in which some minds are different from the 'neurotypical'. Neurodivergent conditions include autism, ADHD, Down's syndrome, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, learning disabilities, OCD, Tourette's and other ways the brain learns and thinks differently**
- Have you ever faced discrimination or disadvantages due to aspects of your identity? How can we practise self-care through this? **Self-care is the practice of taking intentional actions to maintain and improve one's physical, emotional and mental well-being. In a world where there is much to be improved, taking time to care for yourself can often be a revolutionary act!**
- Do you ever experience privilege due to aspects of your identity? Is it possible to use your privilege to be a good neighbour? **Privilege is the unearned advantages individuals receive based on aspects of their identity, like race or gender. These benefits often lead to better access to opportunities and resources, highlighting systemic inequalities**

Read Philippians 2:5-11

- Jesus had an immense amount of privilege as God. How did he view and treat that privilege? Is there any way in which we can emulate Jesus' approach?
- Who is your neighbour in all of this? Sometimes the neighbour is the person doing the discriminating and we are called to love them too.

Activity

Prayer Chain

Make a people chain and write prayers for your neighbour on each person. Spend time praying silently or out loud for what is written on the paper people.



all are welcome – REFUGEES and asylum seekers

Welcome Churches campaign

There were 74,751 asylum applications in 2022, according to the Home Office. If every church in the UK welcomed two people seeking refuge, then no refugee would be alone. Welcome Churches (www.welcomechurches.org) grew out of a church-based Welcome Boxes project for asylum seekers in Derby, sending volunteers to welcome these new neighbours with a box of small gifts as a token of friendship and a first friendly 'hello'. The Welcome Network has grown and now more than 1,100 churches from many denominations are part of the network. Is this something your congregation could do? The charity has training and resources for churches, including trauma awareness, cross-cultural working, understanding the asylum system and more. Welcome Churches is also developing refugee-facing work through **FindYourWelcome.org**, empowering refugees to access information in their own languages about life in the UK and to refer themselves for a welcome from a local church.

'Before I found the church, I was really struggling. All my family was gone. I felt so lonely and lost. I remember the first time I visited my church; I felt so welcome and I found a new life. I was really encouraged, especially when people prayed for me. I had lost my whole family, but with my church I have found a new home and a new family.'

— Abbas, Kurdish refugee

Lift the Ban campaign

People seeking asylum in the UK are effectively banned from working. They can only apply to the Home Office for permission to work if they have been waiting for a decision for over 12 months, and only for a very limited selection of jobs. This means they are unable to provide for themselves and their families, and often live in poverty. People who have risked everything to find safety in Britain should have the best chance possible of living in dignity, contributing to society and integrating into their new communities.

That's why JPIT is campaigning for asylum seekers to have the right to work after six months, as part of the Lift the Ban coalition. It believes that the current ban is unfair, and wasteful of both public money and the talents of our population. Giving asylum seekers the right to work would help provide a route out of poverty, save public funds, and aid integration. It is also supported by two-thirds of the public. Find more details about the campaign at: jpit.uk/issues/asylum-and-migration/liftheban and write to your MP, sign the petition, raise awareness or download the activism pack.



Leviticus 19:33-34 (*Contemporary English Version*)

Don't mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat them as well as you treat your own people and love them as much as you love yourself. Remember, you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.



Welcoming the stranger

Affirmations for faith leaders

A core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other. I shall treat him or her as I would like to be treated. I will challenge others, even leaders in my faith community, to do the same. Together with faith leaders, faith-based organizations and communities of conscience around the world, I affirm:

I will respect the right of the stranger to practice his or her own faith freely. I will seek to create space where he or she can freely worship.

I will speak of my own faith without demeaning or ridiculing the faith of others. I will build bridges between the stranger and myself.

Through my example, I will encourage others to do the same. I will make an effort not only to welcome the stranger, but also to listen to him or her deeply, and to promote understanding and welcome in my community.

I will not keep silent when I see others, even leaders in my faith community, speaking ill of strangers, judging them without coming to know them, or when I see them being excluded, wronged or oppressed.

I will encourage my faith community to work with other faith communities and faith-based organizations to find better ways to assist the stranger.

I will remember and remind others in my community that no one leaves his or her homeland without a reason: some flee because of persecution, violence or exploitation; others due to natural disaster; yet others out of love to provide better lives for their families.

I will welcome the stranger. My faith teaches that compassion, mercy, love and hospitality are for everyone: the native born and the foreign born, the member of my community and the newcomer. I will remember and remind members of my community that we are all considered 'strangers' somewhere, that we should treat the stranger to our community as we would like to be treated, and challenge intolerance.

I recognize that all persons are entitled to dignity and respect as human beings. All those in my country, including the stranger, are subject to its laws, and none should be subject to hostility or discrimination.

I acknowledge that welcoming the stranger sometimes takes courage, but the joys and the hopes of doing so outweigh the risks and the challenges. I will support others who exercise courage in welcoming the stranger.

I will welcome the stranger.

I will offer the stranger hospitality, for this brings blessings upon the community, upon my family, upon the stranger and upon me.

I will respect and honour the reality that the stranger may be of a different faith or hold beliefs different from mine or other members of my community.

I will speak out for social justice for the stranger, just as I do for other members of my community. Where I see hostility towards the stranger in my community, whether through words or deeds, I will not ignore it, but will instead endeavour to establish a dialogue and facilitate peace.

Honest Church

A lot of churches say they are welcoming of everyone, including LGBTQ people, but are not genuinely affirming. For example, many churches view queer identities as inherently sinful or do not affirm same-sex marriage. This can result in LGBTQ people feeling ostracised, stigmatised and excluded. Ultimately, this is harmful.

Honest Church is a campaign of the Student Christian Movement. It was originally designed to encourage greater honesty about the true welcome that LGBTQ+ people receive in a church. The aim is to prompt and enable churches to be more specific in their communication about LGBTQ+ welcome, both in their publicity and when students, graduates and others come and ask questions about the inclusiveness of the welcome.

The Honest Church Toolkit is for people who are wanting to broach the topic of LGBTQ+ welcome with a church leader, but might not know where to start, and for church leaders who want to consider their LGBTQ+ welcome and improve it. There are suggested questions to ask a church leader, questions for church leaders to contemplate, the Honest Church Spectrum of LGBTQ+

Welcome, and some suggestions for how to improve your church's welcome:

www.honestchurch.org.uk/home#94993393-68ab-491c-9792-789be06c9bee

Invite church members to reflect on the core message of the church regarding LGBTQ, their policies on inclusion and to further develop them.

- Consider getting involved in your local Pride celebrations. You could display rainbow-coloured placards with affirming messages like 'God loves all'. The witness of a church standing with and celebrating LGBTQIA+ people can be heartwarming and healing, especially for those whose churches have rejected them, or who assume that all churches disapprove of their identities
- Support LGBTQIA+ people in your community throughout the year, not just at Pride
- Make sure you check things out with people who are LGBTQIA+. Ask as many as possible – there are many diverse identities and experiences!



all are welcome – LGBTQ+

Pride

The story of *Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag*, by Rob Sanders and Steven Salerno is a picture book about the creation of the Pride flag. Take some time to learn the history of the rainbow flag.

Points for reflection:

- People, couples, and families can come in all shapes and sizes
- We are all included
- God loves all
- Our love can reflect and celebrate God's love.



Take time to listen to the stories of LGBTQ+ people, including:

- Stories of self-realisation, coming out, discrimination, acceptance
- Stories that acknowledge the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ people and the mundanities of LGBTQ+ life.

What is the Queerstory of the Bible?

Are there queer identities and relationships in the Bible? LGBTQIA+ people can find themselves in the stories of characters whose love and affection for one another challenge our assumptions and idea of love, family, and gender. For example:

- David and Jonathan: 'Your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women' (2 Samuel 1:26)
- Ruth to Naomi: 'Where you go, I will go' (Ruth 1:16)
- Martha, Mary and Lazarus are an unconventional family, not defined by a couple and children, or by patriarchal dominance, but by equanimity. The Bible tells us they were sisters and brother, but the reality is that throughout history many queer households act as chosen family rather than biological family units
- The Ethiopian eunuch represents a class of person existing outwith the traditional gender binary and their baptism demonstrates God's radical inclusion (Acts 8:26-40)
- The kingdom of God is not what we expect and is unlike anything we have experienced
- 'So the last will be first, and the first will be last' (rich person entering the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 19:16-30 and the Labourers in the Vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16)
- God turns the world upside down (Acts 17:6)
- 'In Christ there is no male or female, no Jew or Greek, no slave or free' (Galatians 3:28).

Song

For Everyone Born a Space at the Table:

www.hopecublishing.com/find-hymns-hw/hw9008_37.aspx

all are welcome in Christ –

BIBLE STUDY, 14+

Activity

Think about something you are passionate about. It might be a hobby or an interest or a favourite band, book or movie. Time yourself and see if you can talk about it for a minute. It's easy to talk to others about things that we love, but sometimes as Christians, we find it harder to talk to others about Jesus but that's exactly what Jesus has asked us to.



Bible study one

The great commission

Read the following passage from Matthew 28:16-20. The two versions are from the New International Version and The Message. You can look up different translations at www.biblegateway.com.

New International Version:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."



Bible Society Australia – The Wild Bible

The Message version:

Meanwhile, the eleven disciples were on their way to Galilee, headed for the mountain Jesus had set for their reunion. The moment they saw him they worshiped him. Some, though, held back, not sure about worship, about risking themselves totally. Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

Questions for discussion:

- What does Jesus tell his disciples to do?
- Do you find it hard to tell others about Jesus?
- What sometimes stops us from telling others about Jesus?

Thinking about what God has done for us

A great way to share our faith is to think about the difference God has made in our own lives. Personal stories are often so much better because people can then see the difference that knowing God has made to you. Think about the following questions and use them as a tool to help you share your faith with others:

- Where have you seen God in your life this week?
- Can you think of some things that God has done for you?
- What made you decide to follow Jesus?

Bible study two

On the road to Emmaus

Luke 24:13-29 (*New International Version*)

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked.



"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.



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and College Press Publishing*

Questions for discussion:

- How did Jesus begin the conversation?
- What can we learn about how to share our faith from what Jesus does here?

Prayer

Think of someone that you know who doesn't know God. This might be a friend or family member. Write their name down on a piece of paper and keep it with you this week. Whenever you are reminded of them, pray that God would give you an opportunity to speak to them about your faith.

Further resources

If you're looking for more ideas or help with sharing your faith, look at the following resources:

- The four points is a website that talks through the key components of the Gospel: www.the4points.com/uk/index.php
- Jesus at the door (evangelism website): www.jesusatthedoor.com
- 3Story aims to help you share your faith: www.yfc.net/3story-for-churches
- Evangelical Alliance has resources to help you share your faith: www.eauk.org/great-commission/youth/resources
- The URC has a new web page on evangelism in the URC, with lots more resources: www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/evangelism-in-the-urc

all are welcome in christ – mission, 16+

Extending God's welcome through mission

Okay, so you're young, Christian, and wondering how/if you can share your faith with your mates. Have you considered just telling them that they need to be washed by the blood of the lamb in order to be saved?

Yeeeeeeeah... when it comes to evangelism and mission, a lot of the traditional language and ideas seem to come from a different era and would – if we blindly put them into practice – provoke amusement at best, scorn at worst. And yet, whatever our theological grounding, sharing words of hope, acts of justice, gestures of love with friends and even strangers is a central strand of our faith. From Jesus' call to not hide our lights under bushels (you own at least three bushels, right?) in Matthew 5:15 to his great commission 'to make disciples of all nations' in Matthew 28:19 – sharing the gospel (literally 'good news') with others, in deed and word, is what we're called to do. So what might that look like in today's world?

Well, God created each of us unique, with diverse gifts and living in very different contexts, so it's going to look very different for each of us. But, if a general framework would be helpful to start from, why not trying the following.

Step one: pray

'We love because he first loved us' – 1 John 4:19

Whether we think we have a message to proclaim or good news to share, the starting point of any mission/evangelism is in prayer because it's here – alongside good Bible study – that we are reminded that everything starts with God's grace, not our actions. We can love others once we've begun to understand that we are loved ourselves (that understanding in itself takes a lifetime!). We can forgive, serve, share goodness and good news with others once we trust that God has forgiven, served, shared goodness and good news with us. This is the sacred sequence. The holy flow is from God to us to others. The more we want to share living water with friends and strangers, the more we need to drink from the well ourselves. This certainly doesn't mean we have to be prayer-perfect, church-certified, biblical know-it-alls in order to share the gospel with others (just remember – the only people who Jesus ever had a go at were those who considered themselves such!). All it means is that whatever you choose to say or do is more likely to be anchored in God's love for you, for others and for the cosmos, rather than in our desire to make other people think like us.

'Fitting in is one of the greatest barriers to belonging. Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need me to be in order to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are.'

– Brene Brown

Step two: do

'Preach the gospel. And, if necessary, use words.'

Many of us will be familiar with some formulation of these words, often attributed to St Francis of Assisi. That's because it's great advice. We all know that how someone acts usually has a much bigger impact

on us and on our trust of them, than what they say. Today, that feels more true than ever. In fact, there is a wealth of evidence that shows that many in our society have a negative view of Christianity (take a look at any recent headlines about the Church, and you'll soon work out why!). So, if we want to share anything about our faith, we need to earn the right to do so through our actions. If you believe in a God of justice and joy – go live it!

What does that look like? Well, it will mean different things for all of us. It could mean joining the local litter-pickers or signing up to your school/uni Amnesty group; it could look like WhatsApping your mate until the early hours, listening to their heartbreak after they just got dumped, or inviting that guy who smells to sit next to you at the lunch table... there are a gazillion ways that we can share God's love wherever we are. If you ever feel like you're not doing big enough things, just remember that God's kingdom is glimpsed in mustard seeds, hidden yeast and lost coins – in the small and ordinary things of life that can reveal the extraordinary love of God.

Step three: ask

'And Jesus said to them, "What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?"'

– Luke 24:17

The story of the road to Emmaus is the perfect example of how we share the gospel with others. It's got it all – welcoming a stranger, finding God at the dinner table, hurt turning to hope, a reminder to go back to the Bible... it's gorgeous stuff. And yet, right at the beginning of this encounter, Jesus asks Cleopas and his companion a question. It's not: 'Do you know who I am?', 'Can I tell you about God?' or even 'Did I ever tell you about the time I... [insert miracle anecdote here]'. No – the question he asks is about them! 'What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?' In other words: 'Tell me about you – what's your story?'.

Too often, as Christians, we can think that we've got the answers, the stories, the good news that everyone else is dying to hear. Sometimes, we even might do! But before we get to that, we need to take an interest in others as people – as the weird and wonderful, broken but beautiful humans made in God's image that they are – not simply view them as potential Christians. Let's ask real questions; listen to the stories of others; find out what people are 'discussing as they walk along'. Maybe that will mean hearing how God is already at work in their lives. Maybe it will mean later being asked to share ours. Or maybe it will simply mean loving them by listening to them.

Step four: tell

'As you go, proclaim the good news – "the kingdom of heaven has come near".' – Matthew 10:7

For some of us, this is the bit we cringe at. For others, the task we want to jump to. But if we've been praying, doing and asking, we might now be ready to speak about our faith. (Note – we don't do the others in order to evangelise. Each is obedient and loving on its own.) How we do this comes down to our own preferences and gifts. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

- Be ready to talk honestly: as Peter says in his first letter: 'Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy' (1 Peter 3:15-16, *The Message*). That means have a think about what you might say to a friend or stranger who asks you about how you live or what you believe. It doesn't mean memorizing the URC Statement of Nature, Faith and Order. Just to talk in a real way about what you believe and what you don't. If you can't answer their every question – that's okay too. Be honest. Ask others. Pick up a book on 'Christian Apologetics' if you really want, such as *Unapologetic*, by Francis Spufford.
- Enjoy a book/play/film together: some people like to give others a book which outlines their faith as a way in. Others might already be involved with a book, theatre, or film club. If so and if it's appropriate, why not suggest a book/film/play which reflects your faith worldview.

What is the Bible, by Rob Bell is an easy-to-read introduction that many of the teenage boys I work with find accessible. I'm also a big fan of going to the cinema with mates, and then discussing where the good news could be found in the film – not too in your face and when you've shared a story together, it often enables us to share our own. Some churches have film afternoons, and another I know preaches on each of the Oscar-nominated films in every Sunday during Lent. So grab a friend and some popcorn and get viewing!

- Wear your faith: for some people, sharing a visible symbol of your faith can be a helpful way to start conversations. You could wear a cross or 'refugees welcome' T-shirt. You could put an ichthus fish on social media, put a poster of your favourite Christian singer on your wall or get your best Bible verse tattooed on your arm. Just be ready to explain why Christians don't have to obey Leviticus 19:28!
- Invite a friend to something: it could be to a church service or Christian festival (Greenbelt's my go to!); to a political protest or house dinner; to a church quiz night or good, old-fashioned barn dance. You could put on a specific event that you think wouldn't be too weird for others to come to. For many people, that might mean hosting an event beyond the church – at a café/pub/cinema etc. I tried out a 'wake for Jesus' at a pub on Good Friday evening a few years back (essentially, have a drink and share a favourite story about Jesus!). Some thought it strange, others were intrigued! What would be authentic to you?



There are many ways that we can show and tell others about God's love for them. For some, it's strategic and structured. For others, it's scattered and Spirit-led. So have a think about it, start with prayer, give it a go, and leave the rest to God.

all are welcome through social media

Evangelism for 16 to 25-year-olds – extending God's welcome through mission

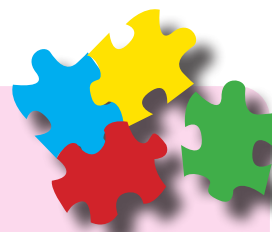
Evangelism through social media

Aim: To inspire and equip young people to understand and confidently participate in evangelism through the platforms of social media, spreading God's welcome to all.

Activity

Story Swap

Put everyone into pairs and have them tell each other a personal story about when something surprising happened to them or an unexpected encounter. After a few minutes, ask everyone to come back and have every pair share their partner's story as if it were their own (but introducing themselves as their own name to save confusion). This will build storytelling and communication skills.



Part one: understanding evangelism

Group discussion: What is evangelism?

Explore different perspectives and definitions, brainstorming ways they have seen or experienced evangelism in their communities, highlighting different forms of evangelism, especially evangelism on social media, but also emphasising that evangelism is something personal to you and you can do it in any form you feel comfortable with. Highlight how evangelism is not only about preaching, but also living out the message of love and acceptance.

Part two: talk about the concept of 'All are welcome'

Storytelling: In groups or within the whole group, people share stories of when they felt welcomed in church/Christianity or when they extended a welcome to someone else, or share a story/example from the Bible that illustrates the idea of welcoming all in Christ, eg the Good Samaritan. What impact did it have? It would also be interesting to talk about a time they didn't feel welcomed and we can see how we incorporate that into a style of evangelism too.

Part three: social media evangelism

Main task: using the stories discussed, incorporate all this with social media evangelism by creating a video or a post (slides/presentation available on the website as a download:

bit.ly/URC-all-age-themed-resource).

Reflection

- How did you find the main task?
- Would anyone consider posting any of the content created?
- Do you feel more confident in sharing your faith in this type of way and creating content like this in the future?

Call to action

Ask group members to post something on their social media about Christianity, or that shows their identity as a Christian.

Resources

Social media evangelism for young people:

- www.tiktok.com/@byhisstripeswearehealed
- www.tiktok.com/@all_.for.jesus
- www.tiktok.com/@v.waa

Christian content creators and livestreamers:

- www.tiktok.com/@steph_clark2
- vm.tiktok.com/ZGd851Vek/
- www.tiktok.com/@lborotruth
- www.tiktok.com/@girls.with.faith7
- www.tiktok.com/@fatherbennett
- www.tiktok.com/@siennamae

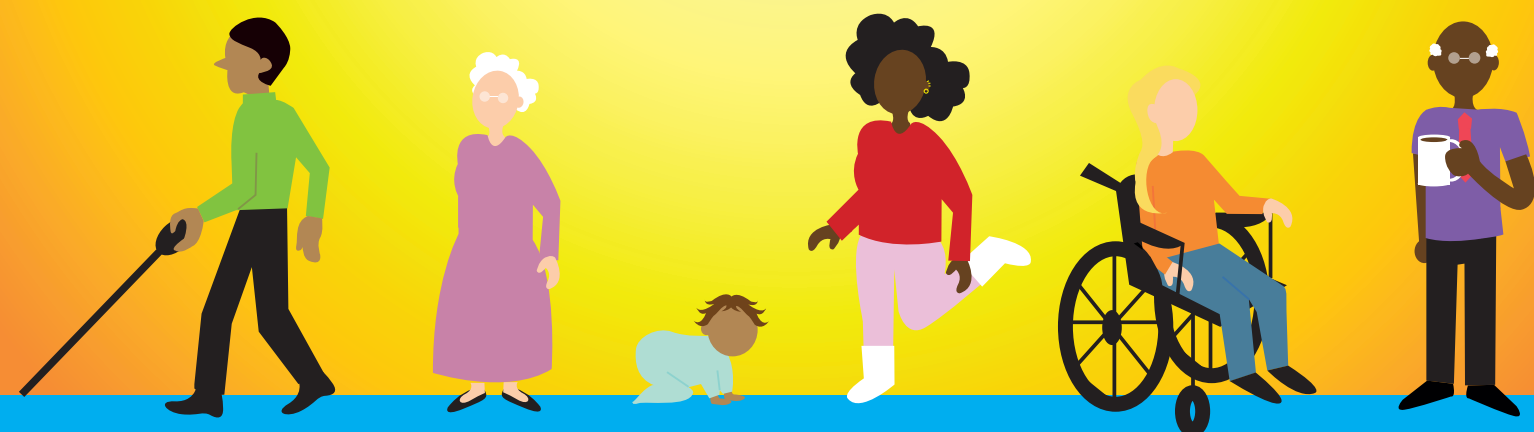
Series of videos focusing on the use of AI content and evangelism:

- vm.tiktok.com/ZGd8PTynx/
- vm.tiktok.com/ZGd85MLsy/
- vm.tiktok.com/ZGd8PT8mg/
- vm.tiktok.com/ZGd852QNx/
- vm.tiktok.com/ZGd8PK5jU/
- vm.tiktok.com/ZGd85hb5p/
- vm.tiktok.com/ZGd85d7Xq/

Progressive Evangelism course

Progressive Evangelism is a course from Student Christian Movement:

www.movement.org.uk/resources/progressive-evangelism. The course consists of four sessions: tackling what is hard about evangelism with its legacy of imperialism; what is our own understanding of the good news; what evangelism in action means for us; and what we are looking for when we look for God. The Affirming Christianity series explores the life of faith in Christ, written by and for people who have shared progressive values and want to grow from those foundations.



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