

Ash Wednesday – ideas for School Collective Worship/family service

Activity

In a school collective worship

Introduction

(Resources: lemon, sugar, ashes (traditionally made from the previous year's palm crosses), oil)

What do these three things have in common? A lemon, a bag of sugar, oil and some ashes

Invite responses as appropriate and agree that they are linked with the start of the weeks before Easter that Christians call Lent

Sorry Not Sorry - Game to introduce the theme of repentance

(Resources: 'Very sorry' 'Not sorry at all' labels (optional))

Ask the children and/or adults to indicate whether they would be sorry or not sorry for a range of instances taken from the list below or your own ideas. If you have the space you can locate 'very sorry' at one end of the room and 'not sorry at all' at the other end and ask people to move from one end of the room to the other to show their 'sorry rating'. In smaller groups this might naturally lead to some discussion as people try to work out where on the line they might stand

- You were asked to move your bag out of the way, and you forgot, and someone has just tripped over it and hurt themselves
- Someone who has been mean to you has lost their phone
- Your Mum baked 10 cupcakes for her friends and you ate one whilst she wasn't looking, and now one of her friends has to go without
- You threw your plastic bottle in to a hedge as you were walking past because you couldn't be bothered to carry it home
- Someone got hit by a car on the zebra crossing down your road
- You repeated the unkind words that somebody else had said about somebody you know and they overheard you saying it
- You were so tired when you got to bed you forgot to talk to God about your day

Depending on how well you know the school setting and how excitable the children can get you can either ask them to put up hands to show whether they would be sorry or not, or stand up and sit down

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Talk

(Resources: Big boxes to build a wall (optional), Bowl to mix the ashes and oil)

Sometimes we do things that we know are wrong like stealing cakes that don't belong to us, sometimes things happen that make us sad, but we don't need to say sorry for them because it was not our fault at all. Sometimes we forget to do what we are supposed to, and sometimes we are just lazy. Often the bad choices that we make have an impact on others, sometimes we get away with it, but that doesn't mean that we made a good choice in the first place. (Christians believe that) The Bible talks about how all of these things can add up and get in the way of our friendship with God, as if every bad choice (list a few from the game) is like a brick in a wall that is built between us and the freedom God offers us to enjoy his love. Christians believe that God loves us so much that he didn't want anything to get in the way of our friendship with him, and so gave us a way to knock that wall down every day. (They) we think that when Jesus died on the cross he took the blame for all the wrong things that we (they) have ever done or ever will do, so that when we (they) say sorry, God can forgive us (them) forever. In the time leading up to Easter, Christians like to remember this more specially and at the beginning of Lent, just after Shrove Tuesday or pancake day many churches hold an Ash Wednesday service. At this service (Christians) we are asked to think about all the things that (they) we might not have said sorry for, and are reminded of God's forgiveness with a symbol that is painted on their forehead. Many centuries ago covering yourself in cold ashes from a fire was a demonstration that you were really sad and sorry that something had happened. Now the symbol of a cross made from ashes (often of the palm crosses from the year before) which is mixed with some oil, is made on the forehead of each participant in the service as a sign to remind them that they have said sorry and God has forgiven them.

Ritual

(Resources: Ash and oil mixture, tissues)

Dip your thumb into the ash solution and make the sign of the cross on the forehead of each participant, and say the words:

*Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.
Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.*

In a school collective worship

Make sure you use the words in brackets i.e. (Christians believe)

With prior discussion and permission from the head teacher you can either:

- Demonstrate the ritual on yourself or
- ask for a child to demonstrate the ritual on or
- invite anyone that wants to join in

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Wonder together

(Resources: powerpoint and music (optional))

Wondering rather than asking questions which require yes or no answers are a great way of helping children and adults tease out the theology of ideas behind rituals that we might take for granted or not understand the significance of.

Wondering can be done alone in a time of space and quiet, or in small groups, or both. If you are performing the ritual on a large group of people you could suggest that they wonder whilst they are waiting for everyone to have their turn

- I wonder why churches often make the ashes from burning the palm crosses from the year before
- I wonder why the cross mark is put on the forehead
- I wonder what things I say sorry for that I don't really mean
- I wonder what things I should say sorry for

Final Prayer

Thank you father God that you love me so much that you don't want anything to get in the way of our friendship. I am sorry for all the things that I have done that have hurt other people. I am sorry for all the kind things that I should have done but didn't. Thank you that you forgive everyone that says sorry to you. Amen

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How you manage this will depend on the size of the gathering and how easy it is to get them back under control once you have encouraged conversations. You could ask them to do the wondering while you play a piece of related music and/or show them a powerpoint of relevant pictures

Make sure you know that the head teacher is happy with you saying a prayer, but it is always a good idea to say something like 'I am going to say a prayer, if you wanted to say that too, you can say 'Amen' at the end'