Planning Celebrations

of the Word

A **second** guide to accompany

 ‘**To love you more dearly’**,

 the Prayer and Liturgy Directory

for Catholic Schools, Academies and Colleges in England and Wales

March 2025



**CONTENTS**

**Section Page**

Foreword, Aims and Acknowledgments 3

Introduction 4

Gather 5

Word 7

Respond 8

Mission 9

Further Resources 10

# Foreword

Prayer and Worship are at the heart of the Christian life. It is through our personal prayer and public worship that we grow in understanding, knowledge and love of our God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Parents are the first nourishers of a life of prayer for their children, but as teachers in a Catholic School, you are charged in a particular way with this holy task.

I hope that these guidelines will help support you in this.

Also, I would like to take the opportunity to thank other Dioceses and individuals whose generosity in sharing resources have made this document possible. A particularly warm expression of thanks to Alan Dewhurst in pulling the material together making it accessible to all.

**Rt Rev Ralph Heskett CSsR, Bishop of Hallam**

# Aims of this document

The purpose of this guide is to support schools in their planning and preparation of the opportunities for prayer in their communities, following the publication of the Prayer and Liturgy Directory for Schools – **To love you more dearly** – with full implementation from September 2025.

This section focuses particularly on the more structured opportunities for prayer, where the time allotted allows for a number of elements that point towards the liturgy.

The term ‘celebrations of the word’ is used in this Directory for celebrations which are created for the school community **and not directly taken from the liturgical books of the Church**. We will focus specifically on the four-part celebration commonly used in schools.

# Acknowledgments

The Diocese of Hallam acknowledges the generosity of other dioceses in England in allowing the adaptation of the resources they have produced in support of The Prayer and Liturgy Directory. In particular, grateful thanks are given to:

* Tom Baptist, Director of Chaplaincy, Our Lady of Lourdes CMAT, for his inspirational insight and creativity in designing resources for use in schools.
* The Dioceses of Nottingham, Westminster and Leeds
* Advice received from clergy, teachers and lay chaplains within Hallam Diocese

**Introduction**

**Celebrations of the word** – These celebrations will take many forms, but the common element is the **proclamation of scripture**.

They may draw upon elements of the liturgy, such as its texts, symbols, and gestures, which help to reinforce their Catholic nature, but the various elements may be used with greater creative freedom than in the liturgy.

The Prayer and Liturgy Directory describes a Celebration of the Word as ‘a celebration which focuses on God speaking to us through the scriptures, and which creates space and form for our response’ (PLD, 7.3, p39). When pupils gather together and reflect on God's word, it deepens their understanding of scripture and its connection to their lives. This shared experience also strengthens the school community as it encourages everyone to live out scriptural values.

Celebrations of the Word can take many different forms, ‘at its simplest it might consist of a moment of gathering to centre minds and hearts, a short reading, a time of silent reflection, and an invitation to move back to the rest of the day.’

However, fuller patterns are also possible, with a more developed introductory section and the inclusion of intercessions as a response to the reading. At its most complex, this pattern can be expanded into the typical carol service, where there is often a sequence of readings, to which carols and prayers form a response. A celebration of the word will form the basis of many longer times of prayer, including assemblies or special liturgies to mark times in the school year.’ (PLD, 7.3, p39). In addition, a retreat could be an extended Celebration of the Word.

The **four-part celebration** is the most common structure, usually labelled as:

**Gather Word Response Mission**

Choice of what should be included in each element will be influenced by the size of the group, the age and stage of development of those taking part, and where the celebration is set.

Choice should also be reflected by consideration of the 4 S’s lenses:

**Season Scripture Senses Structure**

although the latter, structure, is partially set up.

**Gather**

During this part, the pupils are brought together and supported to transition to a time of worship that is distinctly different from the rest of the school day. Suitable music can be played, pupils are invited to make the sign of the cross, and an opening prayer linked to the scripture theme is shared. This all sets the tone for the rest of the celebration of word.

Other example of ways to gather include using an image for reflection, lighting a candle, or sharing a hymn. If the celebration comes after a break, when all pupils are away from the space, a processional element could be introduced.

Having a ritual / regular way of gathering is useful as it helps to focus pupils on what is happening and prepare them for receiving the Word. Ideas for Gather include:

* Create a focal point to help pupils to focus during prayer using cloths, a projected image, photographs, painting, Bible, crucifix, statue, rosary, lighted candle, special object, flowers etc. We can meet God in visual images, and they can be a powerful catalyst for prayer. Remember quality and not quantity. Ask yourself, is it attractive, would it help me, is it relevant, does it reflect the theme, the liturgical year?
* Use liturgical colours (green for ordinary time, purple for Advent and Lent, white/gold for Christmas and Easter, red for apostles, martyrs, Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Pentecost, white/ blue for Our Lady
* Use symbols of the season, e.g. red poppy, autumn leaves, seas shells, and symbols of Baptism. God can be found in all things!
* Play reflective music – listen reflectively, use sign language, or sing as you gather
* Change the lighting to create a different atmosphere
* Light a candle – a sign of God’s presence and love
* Try various ways of gathering: into a circle e.g. one hand on shoulder in front/ various seating patterns e.g. theatre style, circle, semicircle, group/ Collect a class at a time/ Each class to bring their class candle or alternative symbol to a central display
* Repeat a line/ chant/ mantra e.g. joy, peace, love, Come Lord Jesus Come, (Advent) Peace on earth, (Christmas) I will follow you, (Lent) Jesus is risen, (Easter) Come Holy Spirit (Pentecost). A mantra is a holy word or phrase which is repeated often and can provide a precious moment of prayer.
* Make the sign of the cross
* Use breathing/ stilling routine – relax, concentrate on breathing. Breathe in God’s peace. Breathe out any worries. Be still inside and out
* Pass something round to hold attention, e.g. a holding cross
* Picking up a pebble, picture etc, on the way in
* Use a signalling sound, e.g. triangle, bell, bowl
* Sit in an outside space
* Contribute item to a display, e.g. pebble, coin, prayer card, flower,
* Have a prayer board for prayer intentions. These intentions could be placed here at any time during a day and brought to the next time of prayer.
* Consider sending out an invitation to others to join you.

**Word**

Preparation for any celebration should start with the consideration of the choice of scripture.

The Scriptures are a primary source of faith, a sacred sign of God’s presence and should be given prominence. The Word is proclaimed, and pupils are encouraged to actively listen to God speaking to them.

Ideas for Word include:

* Listen to a reading from the New or Old Testament (Sometimes it is sufficient to present just a few sentences).
* Greet and respond with the appropriate words from the liturgy of the Church.
* Gospel Acclamation: Process and enthrone the Bible/Gospel, elevate the Gospel, carry candles, stand to show respect, sing alleluia when appropriate
* Use the gesture: ‘+Jesus be in my mind +on my lips + and in my heart’
* Lectio Divina: Use same scripture reading over the course of a week to deepen spiritual insight.
* Care should be taken over how the reading is proclaimed: If a pupil, develop the ministry of proclaiming the Word. Ensure that whoever is reading, has had time to prepare and is capable of reading confidently, and has understanding of what is being read. A stumbling or uncertain approach to reading takes away from the message of the scripture.
* For some pupils, a visual representation of the reading can be used, on a screen. However, whenever possible, proclaim the scripture from the book of the Bible, or from a presentational folder that represents the Bible.

**Respond**

During this part, pupils should reflect and respond to the scripture reading. There are numerous ways this can be done, including sitting in silence, a Lectio Divina, drama, a video, meditation or an explanation.

However, this is not a time for a religious education lesson or comprehension style questions about the scripture reading but a time to consider the deeper theological meaning and the impact of scripture on us personally.

 Ideas for Respond include:

* Invite the pupils to talk silently to God about what they feel and what ideas they have. (If silence is difficult, play some quiet music in the background)
* Invite children to thank and praise God for his giftsin silence
* Pray for the needs of others using liturgical responses like ‘hear our prayer’.
* Use a litany style prayer ‘For… we thank you God’. ‘For the times…. We are sorry’.
* Use prayerful signs/gestures/actions to accompany a prayer, song
* Use a mantra, a word or phrase to repeat.
* Blessing with water or dipping the hands in water while music is played is a prayerful gesture.
* Use traditional prayers. There are many that have been handed down through the history of the Catholic Church and it is important for pupils to take part in and become part of this tradition.
* Pass on a sign of peace, holding cross or other object.
* Depending on the theme, invite children to reflect upon the times when they remove themselves from God’s presence, that they do not build up the kingdom of God. Ask for forgiveness and help.
* Destroy papers, throw away; representing sins (reconciliation)
* Respond using drawing, painting, etc
* Have a time of Prayer journaling or Mandala colouring
* Invite pupils or students to think of a person and pray silently for that person in light of the theme of the celebration.
* Bring to mind those or an intention the class or form want to prayer for, name them orally, or choose a personal prayer from the class/form prayer box, tree or display and pray for that person or intention in silence.

**Mission**

During this part, a mission is shared with the pupils which reinforces the scripture theme and encourages pupils to actively respond to scripture in their daily lives.

Celebrations of the word typically conclude with a closing prayer, reflection, or blessing linked to the scripture theme and mission.

Ideas for Mission include:

* Request to do something linked with the Word, e.g. a promise to do something, to put the mission into practice through personal example, such as demonstrate an act of forgiveness, show love to another person, take home a message from the celebration, etc.
* A memento can be given as a reminder to be loving and serving, e.g. card, small shell, a prayer card, coin, small shiny pebble
* Make an internal promise to be held for the rest of the day
* Make a vocal promise
* Reflect (at another time) on how their ‘mission’ has impacted on others.
* Encourage the recording on post-it notes later in the day to add to a display representing the theme.

**Further Resources**

* Cafod: Celebration of the word resources for primary schools <https://cafod.org.uk/education/primary-teaching-resources/celebration-of-the-word-primary>
* Cafod: Celebration of the word resources for secondary schools <https://cafod.org.uk/education/secondary-and-youth-resources/celebrations-of-the-word-for-young-people>
* St Thomas of Canterbury School – Celebration of the word progression map <https://www.st-tc.co.uk/images/CotW_Progression_map.pdf>
* Let Us Pray 2 Together – Resource for planning celebrations of the word <https://www.ndcys.com/letuspray/>
* Planning Sheet: Nottingham Diocese Catholic Youth Service <https://www.ndcys.com/resources/#single/0>
* 12 Collection Worship Plans for primary schools – The God who speaks <https://www.godwhospeaks.uk/primary-collective-worship-resources/>