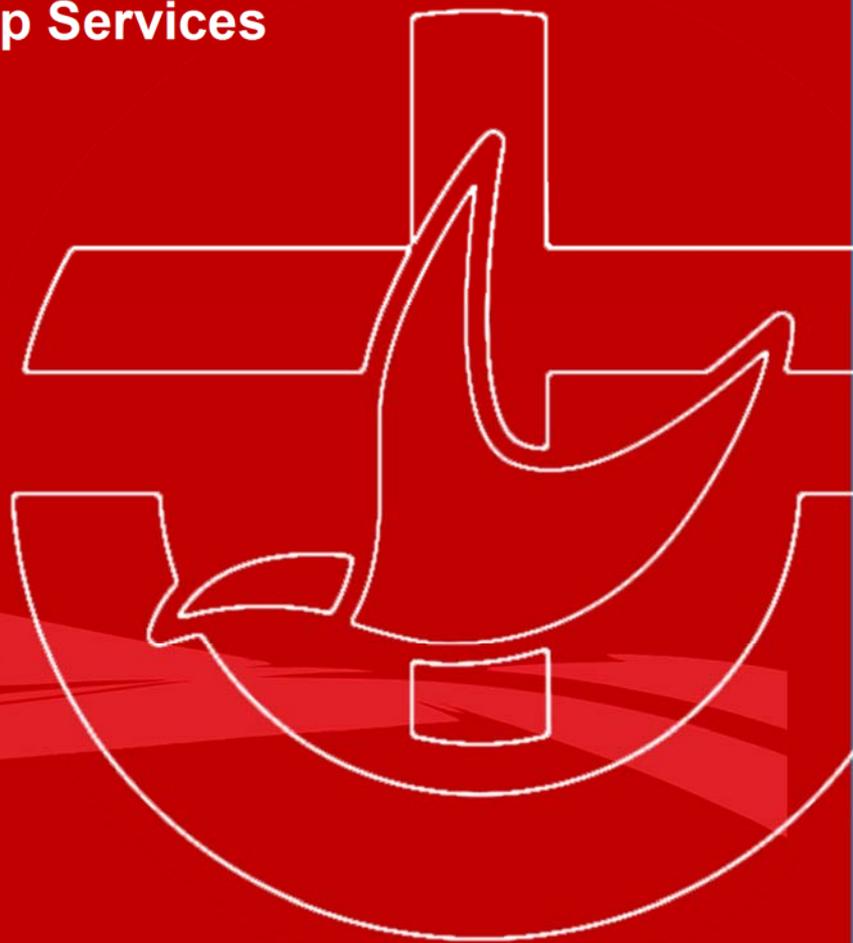

Uniting in Interactive and Collaborative Worship

Bringing Interactive and Collaborative Learning Experiences into Worship Services

SAMPLE SERVICE

Suggested Interactive and Collaborative Worship Service Activities



Uniting in Interactive and Collaborative Worship

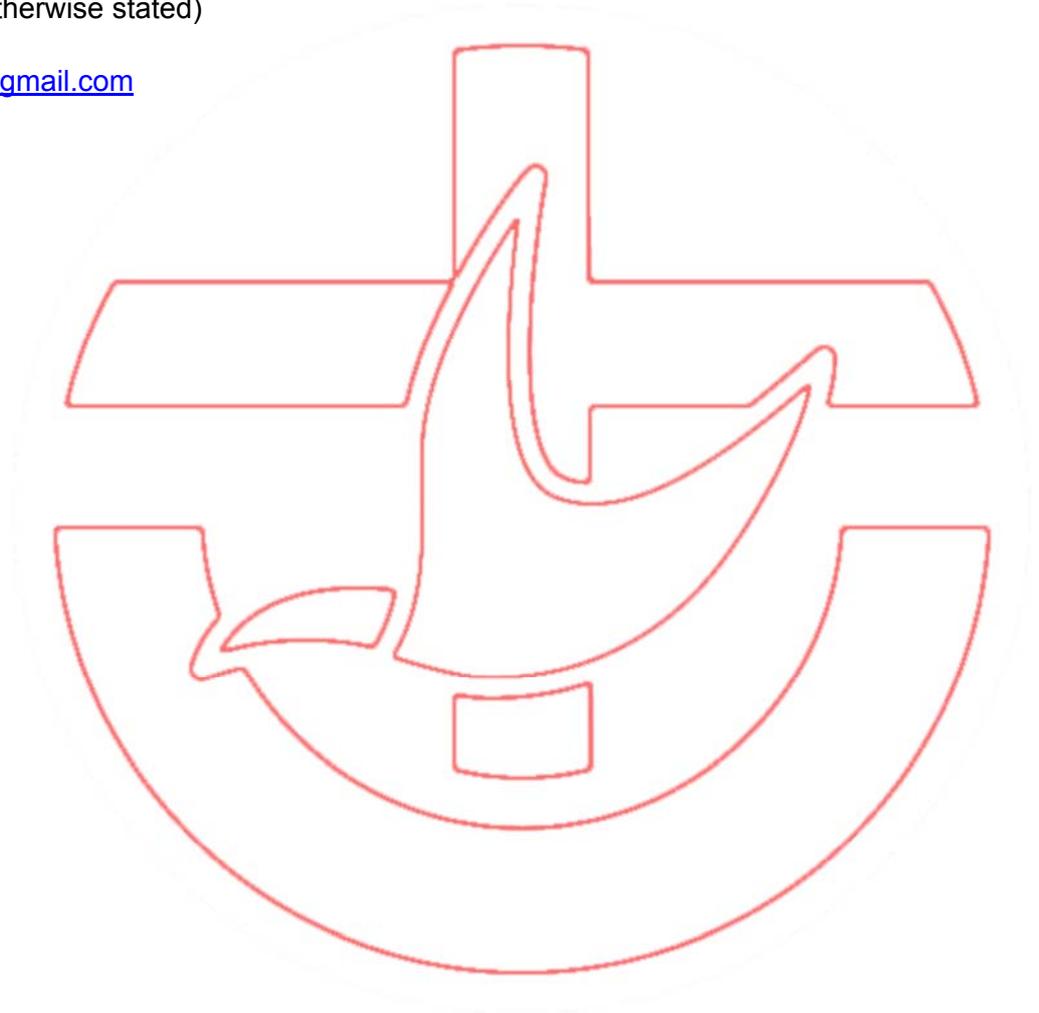
Compiled by Jon Humphries

Sample Service, 2014

Ideas and activities developed and compiled by Jon Humphries
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A Changing Church Initiative 

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SAMPLE SERVICE: Incorporating Interactive and Collaborative Learning / Participatory Experiences

Uniting in Interactive and Collaborative Worship - An Introduction

Uniting in Interactive and Collaborative Worship is a resource for the Church which seeks to weave some of interactive elements into the rhythms of the traditional Service of the Lord's Day as set out in 'Uniting in Worship 2'. This is a resource that is currently under development. This document comprises a sample of the kind of service which is possible using the kind of style of worship which the resource promotes. It is a taste of some of the activities which will be included in the resource.

WHY BOTHER?

The Greek word that we get the word liturgy from is leitourgia (leitourgia) which can be loosely translated, 'the work of the people.' The form of worship service modelled in this booklet is designed to give the people work to do and to get them thinking and creating the liturgy rather than simply participating in a limited fashion such as reading words already prepared for them by the liturgist or worship leader. It is thus about engaging people in the work of liturgy and gathered worship and about helping move people from a passive to an active participation. This development of liturgy in real time is the step beyond involving people in the preparation of liturgy prior to a service.

The second reason for engaging in this kind of worship experience is that that it better correlates with modern forms of education and learning. There is a shift in education across the world to move away from lecture style presentation of information to learner-centred classrooms and learning experiences. This often involves the use collaborative group work learning explorations. There is an increased focus on the need for teaching and learning to not only cater to different learning styles, but also develop to develop them. Uniting in Interactive and Collaborative Worship, seeks to help congregations explore how they might draw on modern education practice and incorporate it into the context of a worship service. The aim is to create engaging experiences that better align with young people's experience of learning and which cater for a range of learning styles and spirituality preferences.

Whilst the notion of collaborative participation and discovery learning may not be familiar or comfortable for many people in older generations, it is more the norm in many leaning contexts in contemporary educational settings. It better allows for a range of learning styles and spiritual preferences. The reality the didactic 'chalk and talk' one way imparting of knowledge is no longer the predominant model of learning for people. Whilst it was for many of our older generations, sitting and listening to someone talk at you is less and less engaging for younger generations. This is one factor in a range of complexities why churches may not be attracting the younger

generations. Whilst this is not the be-all and end-all in getting people to come to church, it is one proactive strategy worth exploring.

The third aspect is that it facilitates in a very real and tangible way part of what gathered worship is about – i.e. the building of connections and community. People working together to shape elements and contribute through participation provides for a powerful shared experience and help people learn about each other through tangential ways due to the focus being on the activity rather than direct one-to-one faith-based sharing which some people find uncomfortable, especially if they aren't used to it.

The collaborative learning exercise in the sermon also utilises the use of smart phones and demonstrates how these are a powerful tool for learning. In this modern age, the preacher does not have to be the wise sage dispensing knowledge, but can use their expertise and learning to shape and facilitate learning experiences which model good exegetical practice for people in the congregation.

Things to Consider

Given that active participation is fairly new to many in traditional congregations, and is not yet a well-established tradition, you will need to be sensitive to the people you are working with and may need to ask a few explicit questions to gauge where they are at.

Given the interactive nature of this type of worship, here are some suggestions to assist people engage with what may be a very unfamiliar and uncomfortable form of worship service:

1. Introduce any activity by setting up the scene and giving people permission to feel uncomfortable, but encourage them to engage with the activities by giving it a go. If people have a reason to engage then they are more likely to.
2. For groups who are largely familiar with more introspective and quiet forms of prayer, or traditional forms of group prayer, it might be useful to start with some of the activities that are closer to their past experience, unless you have advertised it and invited people to come and experience something new and outside their experience. If people come expecting change they are more likely to engage and explore the newness. However, if your aim is to stretch and grow people in a situation such as a regular worship service, you may need to provide good scaffolding through explanation, permission giving and encouragement to aid them in participating in a positive manner.

The elements of this service can be used together or separately. There is a logic to the flow of the service where each element is designed to progressively become more challenging and personal in nature. The use of a focus activity is deliberately intended to divert some of the discomfort of interpersonal interaction as people are concentrating on the task rather than being asked to share more personal connections of a direct activity such as praying out loud with someone they may not feel comfortable with.

Suggestions for an Order of Service Incorporating Interactive and Collaborative Worship Elements

The following is a suggestion. It is not meant to be prescriptive in any way. The suggestions offered relate mostly to the section of the service often referred to in Uniting in Worship 2 as the 'Service of the Word.' This sample has been trialled in a range of traditional congregations, most of those were ageing in constituency, and has worked well. Of course not all people felt comfortable with the activities, but the majority of the feedback was that it was effective and challenging and worth considering.

The Greatest Commandment

The following service is based around looking at the story of Jesus responding to the question, "What is the greatest commandment?"

Song Suggestions:

- Shout to the Lord
- Shine Jesus Shine
- 10, 000 Reasons
- Love the Lord Your God

Collaborative Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Step 1 - Introduction

The leader introduces the activity. There is so much to be thankful for and to offer praise to God for. Being thankful is an act of hope and positivity. The leader explains that the congregation will divide into small groups and be asked to write 2-3 lines of praise and/or thanksgiving.

Step 2 – Two Line Prayer

In this case a starter was provided as it headed up a work sheet for people to write on. Two copies per page were printed, and then the page cut in half, so that each groups received an A5 (half A4) sheet as they were only asked to write a couple of lines. Each group was also asked to select a reader to read the lines that the group had developed.

Examples of prayer starters are as follows:

God of love and grace

Creator of beauty and wonder

Lord of life

Lord of all creation

These are of course only suggestions and you may be able to generate a host of your own. An alternate is to ask for starters from the congregation. Of course the list is almost endless.

The congregation is given about five minutes in their groups to generate their two to three lines.

Step 3 – Praying Together

The leader then explained how the prayer would work and then offer the starter and then randomly goes around the room indicating different groups who each read their lines in turn. At the end the prayer is ended with a simple “Amen.”

The groups’ sheets can be collected and the prayer typed up and distributed, or the prayer that is offered can just be left to have been in the moment it was prayed. The prayer that comes into being is often stunning and beautiful.

Prayers of Confession

Read by a leader.

This part of the service is deliberately read/led by one person, to give people a return to their normal pattern/style of worship, having just stretched them in the first interactive prayer activity.

Here is a suggested prayer

A Prayer of Confession

God of mercy and grace,

In this time we pray.

We are good people.

We try to do the right thing.

But if we think deeply on our lives and connections,

We see that we fall short of being the best that we can be all the time.

We seek to love others,

but at times get caught up in our own problems and issues

We seek to love ourselves,

but at times get caught up in other's problems and issues.

We seek to be caring,

but at times we end up caring more about ourselves

rather than the deep needs of others

Help us to find forgiveness for things that we have done that need forgiveness for which others have been left hurt or disillusioned

Help us to find forgiveness for things that we have failed to do and which have gone undone for which others have been left in need or uncared for.

Help us to find forgiveness for things that others have done or failed to do for us and for which we have been left wounded or disappointed.

God of love and forgiveness,

God of love compassion and redemption

May we find these good things

May all share them in this world

May we each be transformed

so that the world might be transformed with us and through us

as we live your love.

This is asked in the name of the Christ, who embodied all these things in his life shared with us.

Amen

Hearing from the Scriptures

In this particular model of service the Bible reading was simply read by a member of the congregation. Again this was to provide a frame/foundation of normality in the service where so many new elements were being introduced. This provides regular touch points of familiarity and allows people to better cope with the degree of change.

If you were running this service with people very used to interactive and collaborative learning/worship styles then more elements could be made different.

The Scriptures could be read as reader's theatre, dramatized, told in a Godly Play manner or mimed/enacted by a group as they are read. Another alternative could be to use an animation or video which retells the passage or other media such as shadow puppets, light desk sand drawing etc.

Again alternatively the scriptures can simply be projected on a screen and people read the text to themselves in silence. The text might scroll or simply go page by page. A combined approach can be to have someone read the text whilst it is projected. Although this is little different to people simply reading along to themselves in pew Bibles, there is some symbolic difference, as well as a different feel or vibe, with every person's lifted and their attention focused on the same point.

Build a Sermon

An Interactive and Collaborative Scaffolded Exegetical Learning Exercise

In this activity the leader facilitates a research learning activity and then draws the learning together to create an exegesis of scripture through suggesting ideas and questions to the congregation.

Step 1 – Explaining the Activity

Explanation of the activity – i.e. that the congregation breaks into groups of about 6-8 people, preferably with at least one smart phone in each group. Each group then receives an instruction sheet. As there are only five tasks, it is advisable to have multiple copies of each task on hand. There is no problem with more than one group doing each task as it adds to the likelihood that the task will be completed well.

Step 2 – Research and Learning

Each group is given about 8-10 minutes to work on their task. The first two tasks are designed to not require the use of a smart phone or internet capable device. The can be easily completed as long as the Bibles being used have a degree of cross-referencing of Scripture. It is good to have a couple of study Bibles on hand just in case. Each group needs to select a person who will report back to the whole congregation the findings of the group.

Step 3 – Sharing Learning

Each group in turn reports back to the whole. It is helpful to do this in the order of the activities on the following pages, but not necessary. The leader may need to draw out salient point through guiding questions if needed. The leader may also have to fill in gaps if the group has not researched deeply enough or have not finished researching or have followed an unexpected tangent to the question without answering the core tasks of the activity.

Step 4 – Pulling the Pieces Together

The leader draws together the findings and through questions and suggestions (See final sheet of the activity sheets for a summary)

The Greatest Commandment pt. 1

In Matthew 22: 37-39 Jesus is quoted as saying...

"³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

What Jewish Scriptures/Old Testament verses is Jesus quoting from?

Compare what Jesus says to the original verses. Are there any differences?

How might this help us understand our reading?

The Greatest Commandment pt. 2

In Matthew 22: 37-39 we have Jesus summing up the Law and the Prophets (the Jewish Scriptures) in two commandments.

What other gospels have similar verses?

How are they the same and/or different in the different gospels?

How might this help us understand our reading?

The Shema

The Shema is important to Jewish people (Jesus was Jewish and was talking to Jewish people).

What is the She'ma and why is it important to Jewish people?

How might this help us understand our reading, Matthew 22: 37-39?

Mezuzahs

Mezuzahs are important to Jewish people (Jesus was Jewish and was talking to Jewish people).

What is a mezuzah?

What does it contain?

How might this help us understand our reading, Matthew 22: 37-39?

Tefilin

Tefilin are important to Jewish people (Jesus was Jewish and was talking to Jewish people).

What are tefilin?

What are the four verses of Torah they contain?

How might this help us understand our reading, Matthew 22: 37-39?

Step 4. Drawing It All Together

The leader draws together the findings and through questions and suggestions (See final sheet of the activity sheets for a summary).

This interactive and collaborative form of exegesis does not excuse the leader from doing the work beforehand. The leader needs to be very familiar with the material and have some idea of what concepts that may be relevant to draw out. Here the questions provided at the research stage are a crucial scaffold for guiding learning. Also the questions that are asked in the discussion and drawing it together are also important.

Given the fact that the activity is occurring live in real time, the responses – even given the guidance and scaffolding of the questions – can be unpredictable. The leader may also find that people are not yet competent in researching or overlook key aspects of the exploration because they may not yet be familiar with exploring and thinking in this way. Also what is reported by each group may not fully represent what has been discovered, and thus, the facilitator might have to probe the groups learning to draw out what they might have missed as being important to share.

The following is an outline of exegesis that provides a model for guiding peoples' understanding of the passage being explored. It is not a script, but mode salient points that are worth focusing on as the leader helps the congregation think about the passage.

The Greatest Commandment

LEADER'S SHEET

In Matthew 22: 37-39 Jesus is quoted as saying...

"³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Putting the Pieces Together

When trying to understand what Jesus is saying in Matthew 22: 38-40 there are certain things that are worth identifying.

1. This story is in all three synoptic gospels
2. Even in Luke where the words come from a scribe, Jesus agrees that he has answered well.
3. The first greatest commandment is based on Deuteronomy 6:5
4. The Deuteronomy Scripture is **misquoted with the addition of loving God with "mind"**.
5. The Deuteronomy text is part of the Shema which is a key part of Jewish religious practice where they say it at least once a day and on special occasions
6. The Shema, including Deuteronomy 6:5 is included on the scrolls of Mezzuzahs which are special boxes that Jewish people fix to their door frames in response to the instruction in Deuteronomy 6:9
7. Tefilin are phylacteries that Jewish men (and increasingly some women) tie to their arms and foreheads each morning and evening in prayer in response to the instruction of Deuteronomy 6:8

So here you have Jesus (and/or a scribe who was an expert in Torah) misquoting the sacred Scripture that all Jewish people were intimately familiar with and adding to it.

JESUS ADDS TO ONE OF THE MOST SACRED JEWISH TEXTS! That must have been a shock or should have been. Who can add to Scripture? And in doing so it must be extremely important. It would be like someone adding to the great commission.

So we are to love God with the whole of our being: our hearts, bodies, souls, strength, spirit **AND MIND**.

Jesus clearly wants people to think. It was why he used parables as a teacher and did not usually explain their meaning. He often answered questions with questions. He challenged perceptions with miracles, transgressed religious purity and Sabbath laws, and then finally gave himself up to death in a way that totally undid traditional expectations of the Messiah. If we, as Christians seek to follow Jesus, then we are called to think. We are called to use our minds. Discipleship is ultimately about learning and we are called to think outside the square as we bring love in to the world as part of God's redemption. This is part of the greatest commandment and is thus something we cannot sidestep as followers of this remarkable Christ.

Praying Together

Interactive Prayers of Intercession

In this activity groups in the congregation pray together. However, as this is something that people often (especially older generations or introverts) find awkward and/or confronting, the aim is that the scaffold of the exercise allows them to participate in a way that is less challenging/personal.

Instructions

Play stimulus video. The following clip is an example, but the idea is to show something that opens the members of the congregation to a range of suffering people. It could be related to one issue or country or situation or it could cover a range. The following link is a series of images set to the song, 'Pray' by the band Underworld.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tr0LNQbvamA&list=UUmJSgWdKq7-fWMC0t_H3Y-A

After watching the video groups have 5-6 minutes to write a prayer using the scaffold worksheet (see next page).

At the end of the time the groups pass their prayer on to another group and each group then reads/prays the prayer that they received.

The prayers can be collected and shared on social media, the Church website, or in the weekly news sheet or something or added to a congregational prayer resource (if such a thing doesn't this can be the catalyst to start one that people with the gift and passion for prayer can add to.)

Rounding Off the Service

Getting ready to return to the world and the week to come

In this service a more traditional form of the worship service was returned to so that the service ended with people feeling that they had returned back into their comfort zone. So the singing of a song and the pronouncement of words of mission and benediction, along with the singing of a doxology that the congregation usually sings, was all retained so that people left with a sense that, although the service had been very different and very challenging in parts, it still was a service and that there was a sense that it was still 'worship'.

Debriefing and Gathering Feedback

After a worship service of this kind it may be useful to have some focus group discussions to debrief people and gather feedback on their perceptions. This can be done informally by just engaging people in questions over tea and coffee (or other beverage of choice) or by facilitating some groups. Either way it is useful to have a set of three or four main questions. That way the feedback from each discussion threads together to create a picture of the congregations' response

Evaluation and Reflection

Once there has been some feedback gathered, then this can be used to assist in evaluating and reflecting upon the experience.

Things to reflect upon include:

- What worked and what didn't (this will help gain a sense of where the congregation is at and thus what the next step might be in moving forward – i.e. do they need more slowly released steps or are they ready to adopt this style of worship more often, and all the degrees in between)
- The performance of the leader in facilitating the worship event
- What the next step might be
- What form or ideas might be forming for future experiences
- Who in the congregation seemed energised by the experience and may form part of a core team either as supporting participants or as leaders.

Of course there are other questions that can be explored and these are just suggestions to get people started.

References

Uniting in Worship 2 National Working Group on Worship, National Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia (2000)

Horsfield, R. **'Alive to God in Worship,'** National Working Groups on Worship and Doctrine, National Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia (2014)

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/alive-to-god-in-worship>

Would you like to get involved?

If you would like to get involved in the project there are several ways that you can.

1. Trial this service or elements of it and send through some feedback as to how it worked for you or what you might need to help you get it happening more effectively.
2. If you have ideas for interactive and collaborative worship, then send through your ideas and we will add them to the resource with your permission and full crediting of your work.

 **Uniting in Interactive and Collaborative Worship** 

