

The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches presents a brand new RE resource

Unitarian INTERGEN

Full of loads of fun and inspiring
activities for all ages from 7 to 70!



INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE



1. Please keep within easy reach of children of all ages
2. Leave the lid off
3. Always exceed the recommended dose.
4. Please shake liberally before use
5. Contents will not settle in transit
6. Manufacturers cannot accept any responsibility for unhealthy levels of fun, change or inspiration that may be released from contents
7. May contain nutty ideas
8. All in very good taste



INGREDIENTS

Full of ideas for activities, rituals, games and icebreakers for Unitarians of all ages. Useful for Sunday activities, worship, home time and workshops.

NUTRITIONAL INFO

Typical values

Energy	100%
Inspiration	100%
Spirituality	100%
Fun	100%
Development	100%

INTERGEN
By Kate Dean, Lindy Latham and John Harley

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A message from the authors

We hope you will find the suggestions and activities in this resource helpful. We have tried to include as much information as possible, based on our own experiences, so that you have the tools that you need in order to experiment with child-friendly worship or to set up an intergenerational group from scratch.

This is a living resource, which will be enlarged and modified according to your feedback. If you have any ideas for new activities, or suggestions from your own experience, please contact us (John Harley: jharley@unitarian.org.uk) so that we can include them when we update the resource online.

Good luck and have fun!

John, Kate, and Lindy.

1. A Creation Story (by Rev Lindy Latham)

The origins of Intergeren in the UK

Bristol.... 2006... Once upon a time, many years ago now, a young family came to the Frenchay Unitarian Chapel. They were made very welcome and appreciated our theology, our approach to worship, and the way we included the young children to the best of our ability and resources. Young children would occasionally be present at other services, and the service leaders would include them as well as they could.

Having very few young people and no junior church, it was soon obvious that our current services were not really meeting the needs of young families. Special family services were planned every few weeks or so, but often no young people came on that day – much to the frustration of us all!

So a new plan was discussed, in the context of other aspects of “mixed-age worship”. Church members who were interested met together with the following key thoughts in mind:

- Maybe it would work better if we arranged a special time that did not coincide with other worship services.
- This new plan would welcome anyone from our own community, single people or families. We also wanted to find a way to reach out to people in the local community who were looking for a way of belonging to an open minded all age spiritual community.
- It would give an opportunity for a new kind of intergenerational family to emerge: for example, older people whose family was far away, and young families with grandparents whom they rarely saw. This is especially important in these days, when so many activities in the community and school are age-based.
- Current members with grandchildren and other young people whom they cared for might see a new opportunity for socialising in a meaningful way.
- Young people could discover that church could be different and fun.

Arising from these ideas, we decided to hold gatherings once a month at our Meeting House in Brunswick Square. About twenty people came to our first meeting, and over time the ages of participants ranged from nine months to ninety years!

It was also agreed that it was important for us to use the Engagement Group principles which had been developing within some of our Unitarian communities for several years. (See **Recipe for Success.**)

We wanted this new group to have a sense of ownership, so our initial meeting was centred on getting to know each other, and democratically deciding on a name. What did we want to call ourselves? This process was great fun... and after a few meetings the name *Bright Lights* was chosen.

At first there were plenty of ideas of what we wanted to do, but it soon became clear that for us and others wanting to create a group, there was a need for a resource pack full of exciting and challenging activities which could be used in a variety of different settings and would be easy to dip into... hence Intergeren was born!

2. **Always read the label!**

How to use this resource

We have called the main section of this InterGen resource "The Aladdin's Cave", because we want you to dip in and fish for ideas that you can use in your own setting, like a child dipping into a goody bag. We encourage you to use these ideas for activities, games, and rituals for just about any event you want to run, in just about any setting. Some examples may include:

- A religious education programme on a Sunday morning
- A family funday
- Worship for all ages
- Ideas for entertaining children at home
- An intergenerational group like Bright Lights
- Youth weekends
- A school environment
- A spirituality café
- Or one we haven't thought of!

You may like to construct a workshop or event by choosing a combination of various items. For example, you could pick an icebreaker, an activity, a ritual, and a game to finish. Whatever you weave together, try to give the event a good shape, so that at the beginning you help people to gather and get to know each other, in the middle you do something substantial and practical, and you finish by having time to reflect and spend some time together in fellowship. Feel free to modify any of the activities to suit your needs. InterGen can be used as a resource for planning a season of religious education sessions, or kept on a shelf to help create a one-off or even last-minute session.

3. Setting the Table

How to get a group started

Most of this section applies to organising an on-going intergenerational group at a separate time from worship, but it also contains some useful general tips.

Staffing

When setting up an ongoing group, staffing is the most important consideration. A team that works well together will provide stability for the future success of any group. Ideally, the team and/or the team leader should have a mentor with whom they can have regular meetings to share successes and discuss any issues or difficulties that may arise.

With any intergenerational event, support for the leader and the team is important.

- Between two and six volunteers is a good number.
- It is important to have an overall leader/co-ordinator. This role can be rotated.
- Each person brings their own skills and will want to stay within their comfort zone. (Some just like to make the tea!)
- Responsibility for planning and leading different parts of the programme is a way of sharing the work load.
- Whatever role individual staff play, it is important that everyone is part of the group, especially for the opening and closing circles. This emphasises the importance of clearing up before the closing circle. (See also: 'Structure'.)

Note: It is very important that parents/carers know that they are responsible for the safety of their charges and their general behaviour throughout the sessions. It is also possible for adults to bring one or two other children from the neighbourhood, with the permission of the parent or other legal carer.

Timing and frequency of meetings

This will depend very much on individual situations, but the following suggestions have been found to work:

- Two hours gives an opportunity to include a welcoming circle, stories, singing, craft work, refreshments, games, and a closing circle. Shorter times are possible.
- Once a month is good, as this provides continuity. It is helpful to specify which Sunday or day (for example, the fourth Sunday of each month), as this helps folk to become familiar with the pattern of meetings.
- Quarterly meetings also work well. Again, it depends on your situation and the helpers' commitments.
- An early-evening meeting on a weekday could be considered.
- It is better to have a few special occasions which fit into helpers' busy lives than to be too ambitious and risk lack of support due to other responsibilities. Build up slowly!

Setting

Some places of worship have ideal resources to hold intergenerational sessions: a large open space with flexible seating and plenty of chairs and tables, good kitchen facilities, and a garden or safe open outside space and good storage facilities. Many are not so lucky, and so activities will need to be adapted accordingly. Another venue may be considered, although this may add to costs. The Aladdin's Cave section will be helpful in deciding which activities are most suitable for your situation.

For any group, these are important factors to consider before you begin:

- Make sure that the heating, if needed, is turned on in good time!
- At least two leaders should be at the venue half an hour or more beforehand to prepare the space. This could include making a circle of chairs; putting a chalice in the centre on a low table; setting up tables for activities and refreshments; providing a flip chart for any songs or words to be used; providing name badges/equipment, etc.
- Have all activity equipment ready at hand.
- Prepare a welcome notice on the door, especially if you are expecting newcomers.

Resources

Here is a basic list of useful equipment to consider:

- Name badges – stick-on or plastic. Cheapest found on-line.
- Night-light candles, matches, lighter
- Basic art materials (paper, pens, card, crayons, scissors, etc.)
- CD player
- Quiet toys for the very young
- Piggy-bank for donations
- Plastic sheeting to cover floors (old shower curtains are good)
- Magazines and newspapers
- Aprons and old shirts
- Log book or record book to write up sessions
- Accident-record book

See the **Resources** section at the end to help find your local scrap store; they are invaluable sources of materials for all sorts of activities. Also, don't forget charity shops!

Finances

Ideally, ask your church for funds to get you started; or you could try the following:

- Apply for grants from various national and district Unitarian trust funds.
- Ask for donations from participants.
- Hold an event to raise money.

Once the group is up and running, most people will be happy to contribute towards the cost of refreshments, and this will often cover ongoing expenses for renewing craft materials, etc.

Safeguarding

DBS checks are advisable for the main leaders of intergenerational workshops; but they are not essential, as children are generally accompanied by parents/guardians. If people already have a DBS check from a previous organisation, the main leader can record the reference number and date of issue, but cannot keep a copy. For further information on safeguarding issues, see "Safe and Sound" – the GA Safeguarding Policy – which can be found at the Unitarian website (www.unitarian.org.uk): go to "Resources" then "Education and Training".

All places of worship are required to have a safeguarding policy. The policy statement should be clearly on display at all times.

Safeguarding also includes health and safety issues such as protecting everyone from potential accidents. The most obvious are burns from candles or in the kitchen, and cuts during craft activities. Keep the equipment in a safe place when its use is unsupervised, and check the stability of tables and chairs. It is good practice to complete a Risk Assessment form if you are preparing to go off site for a trip or visit. Forms are available from "Safe and Sound" – the GA Safeguarding Policy.

Inviting participants

Start by inviting the congregation. Once the initial group has been formed and has chosen a name which appeals to Unitarians and non-Unitarians, advertise it in the local paper or on Facebook. Perhaps you could make a small pocket-sized leaflet to be left in appropriate places such as on seats after a baby blessing or at a local family event, with wording such as this:

"Doing Church Differently"

Do you feel the need for spiritual community in your life, without the formality of church, where you and all your family are welcome?

Perhaps the [name] Unitarians can help...

Once a month we have a gathering where people of all ages come together to celebrate our common humanity with laughter, creativity, food, and good cheer. Come and be accepted for whoever you are, whatever your beliefs...

[Add your contact details etc.]

4. Recipe for success

The Bright Lights "Engagement Group" model

Bright Lights, the intergenerational group in Bristol, was built around the principles of Engagement Groups. These started in the UK after the 2002 Essex Hall lecture given by Thandeka, an American Unitarian Universalist. The name "Engagement Group" denotes that the group is run according to certain style of leadership and structure, with the following intentions:

1. to deepen the spiritual life of the participants
2. to create community among the participants
3. to learn the principles of "right relationship"
4. to deepen connection with one's church/chapel.

One of the first steps taken when we started Bright Lights was to create an agreement, or covenant, among ourselves, of how we wanted to behave. The following guide might be helpful to other groups. Some of the points are especially important when the group is having circle time:

- Allow one person to speak at a time.
- Allow everyone an equal chance to participate at their own level.
- Refrain from criticising one another.
- Be kind to each other.
- Listen carefully to each other.
- Allow participants to "pass" without having to speak or contribute in any activity.

Several other agreements may be made, according to your situation: for example, restrictions on playing the piano, or on running around. One young member suggested "No Hitting". It is important that everyone's suggestions are considered and taken seriously.

With these principles now agreed, you will have created the foundations of the group: a safe place to meet, with the ritual of the opening and closing circles, a sense of ownership by all, and the fun and flexibility of a creative middle section. More information about Engagement Groups can be found by contacting the Local Leadership Strategy Group via Essex Hall.

A typical Bright Lights Session might look like this:

- Sing a welcoming song.
- Check that everyone has a name badge.
- Light the chalice with some simple words of welcome, possibly linked to the theme of the session.
- Introduce the theme and briefly share the activities to come.
- Invite everyone to introduce themselves; and/or do an ice-breaker activity.
- Move into the main activity (which has been set out in advance). It is a good idea to have a simple back-up activity to suit different wishes/abilities/ages.
- Be ready with a lively game to use up some of the young ones' energy!
- Refreshments. Sitting down all together to enjoy refreshments encourages sharing, helping, and conversation.
- Tell a story, if time; or organise a short meditation (maybe musical/walking/lying down: see the **Aladdin's Cave** section for more ideas).
- Closing circle with sharing and closing song. Don't forget to collect badges, to ask for contributions in the collection box, and to remind people about the next meeting.

It can be helpful to print out the programme for each leader, with approximate timings to help to keep things on track. Although flexibility is important, it is key to the success of the group to leave time for everyone to join in the closing circle.

5. One Small Step, One Giant Leap!

Fostering worship that appeals to all ages

Worship is for many of us a safe and sacred space in which to root our search for meaning and spirituality. We all have different visions of it, and we each cherish certain approaches rather than others. One person's medicine is another's poison. We often have the best intentions when we aspire to change aspects of the way in which we worship, and one of these motives may be for our holy time together to be accessible and relevant to people of all ages. With this in mind, we need to tread slowly and kindly, especially if we want to make lasting change rather than superficial or short-lived changes. Here are a few suggestions to bear in mind as you go about introducing innovations:

- In developing a new approach to worship in your community, try to strike a balance between innovation and sensitivity to tradition.
- If you try a new ritual or activity in worship, always give people the option to participate or not. Make it really clear that those who decide not to participate can still be involved, by witnessing or holding the space.
- Don't change things all at once.
- Regular members need to know that the worship will be different, so give them warning!
- Key leaders need to arrive well in advance, so that the space can be set up sensitively and respectfully, and people are properly welcomed.
- Use a familiar or traditional beginning and ending. The 'bookends' of a service hold it safely and securely. Many people will be open to new ways of worshipping if there are known, dependable building blocks to keep the occasion grounded.
- Bring in change incrementally and slowly.
- It is easier and often more fun to plan innovative worship in a team. You can give each other support and take different roles. Also if you are planning something which could be potentially divisive or unhelpful for the community, then there is a chance that at least one member of the team will spot this. If you work as a sole agent, people are more likely to see you as a maverick and as someone who is making changes for an ego trip.
- Prepare and brief a few key people beforehand if you want to encourage participation – then they are more likely to get involved.
- Involve as many people of different ages and parts of the community as possible.
- Fully intergenerational worship will often not include a formal sermon. You need to think carefully of other ways of exploring a theme, such as an interview-style slot; or a movie or documentary clip (e.g. *The Truman Show*, *Man on Wire*, and *Talking Heads* by Alan Bennett), followed by an open-microphone session for reactions; or a mini-play or other piece of theatre.
- It may help to ease the transition if you plan one fully intergenerational worship per quarter at first. You can use the newsletter to invite people to get involved, and give the congregation plenty of notice to expect some surprises.
- Changing seating arrangements can be especially controversial in some worship settings. If you do make a big change, then stress that it is an experiment rather than a permanent change. For example, if you want to move from formal rows of seats to a circular arrangement, give plenty of notice and perhaps try this format once a quarter in order to process the reactions.
- Think of some way of encouraging some honest feedback from participants, and use these comments in developing further worship.

6. Small is Beautiful

Small changes for child-friendly worship

For many congregations and settings, the challenge of organising fully intergenerational worship does not seem realistic, given their limited human and material resources. With this in mind, we would suggest that small steps can be taken towards making our usual Sunday worship more child-friendly or accessible for younger people. We would argue that any small changes that you can make in order to engage children more fully will inevitably make your congregational worship more dynamic for all ages. We acknowledge that an all-singing and all-dancing intergenerational workshop is just not viable for some communities, so here are some tips for making your existing Sunday morning services more open and appealing to younger people:

- Have a small area in the corner of your worship space kitted out with toys and books that are attractive to toddlers and young children. Make story bags, each containing a story book and some props and soft toys to dramatise it and bring it to life. This area would benefit from a nice rug.
- Install a carpet or rug at the front of your worship space, so that whenever a story for children is shared they will have a comfortable space to sit where they will feel included. This carpet can remain in position for every Sunday service, to remind worship leaders to invite children up to the front, and to give the youngest members a sense of belonging and importance.
- Encourage all your service leaders to read or tell a children's story every Sunday. Even if there are no children, a memorable story will introduce energy and a sense of fun.
- It is good practice to make the first hymn of the service suitable for children; it could be a song or a round.
- Involve children in some way. Some will be happy to light the chalice, or to help give things out as part of a ritual.
- Think about the five senses when creating a piece of worship.
- Engage the body and soul as well as the mind. A flower communion or a simple Easter egg hunt can bring movement and wonder to an otherwise adult-centred worship session.
- Invite a teenager to talk about a project or activity that he or she is really involved in and passionate about. You could follow this with a Q&A slot.

7. Here's One I Did Earlier!

Three examples of carefully structured intergenerational sessions

Session Plan 1: Shared Meal on the Theme of Gratitude

90-minute worshipful session including sharing food, talking, and activities

- Goals:** To offer an alternative form of worship centred around a shared meal
- Suitability:** All ages can participate to a greater or lesser extent
- Duration:** 90 minutes
- Resources:** Finger food to share; plates and cups; tea/coffee; paper, pens, post-it notes; colouring-in pictures; printed thought-provoking Quick Questions* based on the theme

Preparation

If space allows, set up a circle of chairs and tables with tablecloths, and put Quick Questions on the table. Another table for the dishes of shared food should be close by. Paper/pens etc. should be in the centre of the circle of chairs, along with the chalice.

Structure

- Ask people to place their food on the shared table, then sit in the circle.
- Light the chalice (suggested words: "We light this chalice as a symbol of our open minds, loving hearts, and helping hands").
- Introduce the theme; this might include a poem or a reading with a shared response.
- Encourage the children to draw or colour something based on the theme.
- Ask people to help themselves to food and sit at the table.
- Invite them to look at the Quick Questions and discuss them with people near them.
- Gather in the circle, with adults sitting in chairs and children with colouring materials in the centre of the circle. (Ask a helper to sit with the kids.) Ask the adults to share something of their conversation.
- Sing a song together/tell a final story.
- Go back to the shared table to get dessert and tea/coffee.
- Encourage everyone to be a member of Clear-Up Club to clear away the food and craft materials.
- The best Clearer-Upper gets to blow out the Chalice candle!

***Quick Question suggestions**

Theme: The Natural World

Questions about nature

What's your favourite plant?

If you could be an animal, what would you be and why?

When did you last feel the "wonder of nature"? What happened?

Theme: Foods from Far and Wide

Questions about food

What was the first food you tasted which you thought was unusual? What was it?

Why do you think there are different foods in different countries?

How would you describe your favourite meal?

Variation: 'Café Church'

In this format, the emphasis is on an informal worship service where children are free to make a little noise, and adults can get to know each other.

Preparation

- Ask some participants beforehand to bring a three-minute song/poem/reading inspired by the theme.
- Prepare some inspiring quotes or discussion questions for later.
- Set up the space with café-style tables and chairs.
- Have tea/coffee and snacks available (self-service) with a clearly displayed collection plate.
- Put picture quiz/questions on the tables and have a few toys/games for the children.

Suggested order of service

1. Chalice lighting
2. "Open mic": people share their poems and readings, with the worship leader acting as "MC".
3. Share quiz questions in small groups.
4. Gentle music while people swap tables.
5. Share quotes/discussion questions in small groups.
6. Closing words.
7. Clear-up time.

Safety/welfare

With so much moving around, it is important to keep the lighted chalice out of reach of small children.

Session Plan 2: We Can All Learn from Nature, the Great Teacher

A session for the autumn which will involve observing twigs and planting bulbs

- Goals:** To recognise the importance of rest and regeneration for all of us, through the example given by nature.
- Suitability:** From about 3 years upwards (with help for younger ones).
- Duration:** A full Bright Lights style session, with other linked activities, can last up to two hours. It can also be modified to be part of an intergenerational worship service or residential weekend.

Resources

This will vary, depending on the approach, but the basics are listed below:

- Welcoming song (see below).
- Autumn twigs, preferably without their leaves: one for each member.
- Bulbs: daffodils are good, as they flower early and are a good size to handle.
- Bag of compost.
- Trowels or old spoons.
- Medium-sized flower pots (peat pots are good, as participants can directly plant them in their garden later if they wish). See variations.
- Card or plastic labels with appropriate pens to name the pots.
- Newspaper to cover tables and floor.
- Suitable containers for sharing out compost. Old washing-up bowls work well.
- Small watering cans or jugs.
- Separate table with selection of paper/pens/scissors/glue and simple craft materials for extra activity and fast workers.
- Old shirts or aprons to protect clothes. Bin liners can also be cut to suit.
- Food and drink for refreshments. Ask for contributions to include healthy options as well as treats.

Preparation

- Set out a circle of chairs with a small table in the centre for the chalice, a bowl with bulbs in, and a vase/jar for the twigs, plus a container for contributions towards expenses (optional).
- Have a basket/container with badge-making equipment near the door, so folk can make their own as they arrive. They can be collected at the end of the session, to be ready for the next time.
- Flip-chart for the words of the chosen song/programme (or words can be printed and put on chairs).
- If room, have separate tables prepared for bulb planting covered with paper, or set them up outside.
- Have refreshments ready to bring out. Ideally have a separate time when everyone can sit down to eat together, either in the circle or preferably around a table or two.
- Have a game prepared when energy levels need an outlet! Parachute games or Balloon Hockey work well.

Structure

- As people arrive, invite each person to make a name badge.
- While waiting, sing a welcoming song; for example, from *Sing Your Faith* 'Come Come Whoever You Are' (223) or 'Enter, Rejoice and Come In' (33).
- Light the chalice with suitable opening words. For example, a variation on 'To everything there is a season....a time to plant, a time to rest, a time to care...'
- A simple check-in. Ask folk to say their name and something they would like to share about themselves, or a piece of good news. Remember the pass option, and younger

children can get help to answer. (Also see the icebreaker section for other check-in ideas)

- Pass round the container of twigs, with an invitation to look carefully at the structure and notice the marks where the old leaves have been, and new buds which are already there.
- Pass round the twigs. Ask leading questions such as 'Is it alive?', 'What do you think is inside?', 'What will help it to grow?'
- Return twigs to the vase or jar and let the planting begin. Follow instructions re: depth of soil. Encourage folk to help each other and to talk about the feel of compost, etc.
- Those who finish first can help others or go to the craft table and draw, or make cut-out leaves to hang on the twig tree.
- Timing is flexible. This stage can be followed by refreshments and a lively game if needed.
- Make sure that you leave enough time for everyone to help with clearing up. Ideally this should be done before the closing circle.
- Leave about 15 minutes for everyone to regroup in the circle. This is a time for people to reflect on the activity, or to say what they enjoyed most, or to show off/talk about anything they have made or done.
- Talk about what the bulb needs to help it to grow and flower (and link this to our own human needs).
- Go round the circle and ask what folk are going to do to take care of themselves and/or a friend in the next week.
- Ask for a volunteer to go round and collect the badges.
- Sing a closing song such as 'Go Now in Peace' (*Sing Your Faith* 45) and blow out the chalice candle together.

Variations and extra information

- Bulbs can be planted outside in the pots on a nice day, or even directly into the chapel garden.
- Peat pots mean that the bulbs can easily be transferred to members' gardens without being disturbed. If a bulb is to be kept in a pot, use a medium-sized plastic one and keep it in a sheltered cool place through the winter. Water sparingly. As soon as the flower bud appears, it can be brought into a light place indoors – perhaps back to the chapel?
- With a slightly different emphasis, this session could be held in springtime, sowing seeds in pots, and observing buds bursting into leaf.
- If time permits, tell a story that would suit these themes, such as 'Frog and Toad All Year: The Corner' and 'Frog and Toad Together: The Garden' (see Resources). These stories might be used as an alternative if the planting of bulbs and sowing of seeds was not possible to do as a group activity.
- It would be possible to do a shortened version, with one person demonstrating how to plant a bulb. Or say 'Here's one I did earlier' and give everyone a bulb to take home to plant.

Safety/welfare

- Place the lit chalice out of children's reach, or extinguish the candle during the activities.
- Don't let little ones eat the compost.
- Be aware of sharp trowels and scissors.
- Watch for the needs of anyone with mobility issues. Also, remember that some young ones may prefer to work at floor level.

Session Plan 3: Celebrating Diversity and Difference

A group activity involving fruit or pebbles or shells which can be used in worship

Goals

- To encourage mindfulness
- To acknowledge individuality and uniqueness
- To invite people into a ritual in which they can make their own personal connections and physically take part in a collective ceremony

Suitability

Ages 7+

Duration

As a short activity this can be achieved in 20 minutes. As a part of worship in which the group has time to reflect and listen to readings exploring these themes of diversity, it will take longer: 40–60 minutes.

Resources

Fruit (apples, pears, or peaches) or pebbles/shells; a table covered in a white cloth; and some readings if required. The items of fruit or shells should vary in colour, shape, texture, and pattern. Oranges may be a little too similar in appearance for this activity. Cox's apples work well for this, while Golden Delicious are not so suitable!

Preparation

Set up the fruit or pebbles on the white sheet on the table. The items should be spread out with spaces between them, so that each object can be viewed easily.

Structure

- The leader welcomes everyone and introduces the ritual, stating that the group will be celebrating mindfulness, diversity, and individuality.
- A meditation or reading may be shared, to open up some of these themes. For example:

"To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour..."
(From *Auguries of Innocence* by William Blake)

- Introduce the ritual. *"In front of you there is a collection of fruit [or shells and pebbles]. They are all different and unique. In a moment I will invite you to come up to the table and take a really good look at the objects. See if there is one piece of fruit [or shell etc.] that stands out for you. It may be something about its colour or shape that attracts you. Take your time. When you find one that you like, pick it up and take it back to your seat."*
(People come up and choose one of the items in this way. It is important that when everyone has picked one up, the leader collects up the unclaimed items and puts them to one side – maybe in a bag. These items are no longer needed for the ritual.)
- *"Now let's have some time to really look at what you chose. Study it as if it's a rare jewel you will never see again. Get to know it like a friend. Notice its uniqueness. Has it got any surprising marks? Are there any colours that stand out for you? Have a good look from all angles. Give it a name if you like, according to its characteristics – such as Spotty or Grace or Rustic."*
(Participants have 2–3 minutes to look at their chosen object with mindfulness; then

the leader invites them to bring their object back to the table. When all the items have been returned, the leader places them in a bag and shakes them up. Then they are returned to the table and placed in random positions.)

- *"Now when you are ready I would like you to come up to the table and see if you can find your apple/pebble. Make sure that you locate the actual individual apple/pebble that you were looking at a minute ago, rather than any old apple/pebble. Take time to make sure you have the apple/pebble that you made friends with. If you have any doubts, then leave it on the table and study some of the others. When you have located your apple/pebble, you can sit down with it again and feel reunited with it. Some questions to consider: How does it feel to be seeing and touching it again? Do you notice anything new about it? How did that activity feel to you? Was it easy or difficult?"* (If time permits, the leader can give the participants time to get into pairs and ponder on some of these questions for a few minutes.)
- *"Feel free to take your apple/pebble away with you at the end of this worship. You may like to eat it some time with full awareness/keep it as a reminder of being mindful in your life."*
- A reading might be shared, exploring the theme of mindfulness. An extract from Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness* might be read.
- Sometimes a discussion can be appropriate. The following questions might be explored:
 - *How important is it in life to notice things properly and know the look of something really well?*
 - *Can you think of any friends or family whom you know really well – so thoroughly that you know the unique shape and texture of their personality?*
 - *Can you think of any examples in your life when a group of people were unable or unwilling to celebrate an individual's uniqueness, and they were seen merely as a number or just another apple/pebble out of millions?*
 - *What does this activity teach us about stereotyping and racism?*
 - *What insights have you learned from this ritual?*
 - *What might you do differently in future?*
- Some closing words can be used to bring this activity to a close. Themes may include identity, uniqueness, mindfulness, community, diversity, and stereotyping.

Variations

A whole host of other items can be used for this ritual. Be careful to choose objects that are natural and which vary quite a bit in appearance. Other items you might consider are tangerines, nuts, feathers, pieces of driftwood, and flowers.

Safety/welfare

Be conscious of people in wheelchairs or other people who may have mobility issues. If any individual cannot physically reach the table, a tray of the ritual items can be brought to their seat. Bear in mind the possible risk that two people will claim the same apple/pebble when they come back to the table to identify their chosen object. If this happens, then encourage them to share the apple/pebble and reflect on times in their lives when they have had a disagreement!

8. Tasty Topics and Thrilling Themes

Some suggested themes for your event

Some of us might wish it were Christmas every day of the year. Religious festivals can, of course, provide us with strong, inspiring themes for a workshop, an RE session, or worship. But there are many other themes to inspire us. What follows is a list of themes that you might use to give some context and substance to the intergenerational event you are planning. If you are creating a series of Sunday School activities, you may like to choose a topic in order to bring continuity and focus. You may be planning a one-off worship service for all ages, or an intergenerational day for the community. Whatever event you are preparing for, a strong theme or topic can catch people's imaginations and help you to create a session that has a good feel and shape to it. Here are some ideas for themes:

- The Four Seasons
- Festivals
- Rites of Passage
- Darkness and Light
- Journeys
- Pilgrimages
- Dreams
- Creation Stories or Myths
- Famous Unitarians
- Heroes and Heroines
- Water
- Science and Religion
- Celebrating the Senses
- Hands and Feet
- The Life Cycle
- Harvest
- The Weather
- Friendship
- Our Ancestors
- Pets
- The Natural World
- Time
- New Life
- Sports and Games
- Food
- Our Heritage
- Wonder
- Breath of Life
- Animals
- Roots and Shoots
- Adventure
- The Flaming Chalice
- Space
- Leaves and Feathers
- "Past, Present, And Future"
- Different Kinds of Families
- Poverty and Equality
- Blessings
- Trust
- Looking at Life and Death
- Our Life Stories
- Caring For Each Other
- Festivals from Around the World

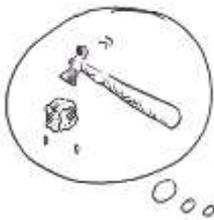
9. An Aladdin's Cave of Possibilities

A goody bag packed full of ideas and suggestions



Aladdin's Cave is featured in the tale of Aladdin from *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights* ("The Arabian Nights"). It is a story full of magic, exotic antiques, surprise, and mystery. In our Aladdin's Cave, you will find a whole host of ideas for every eventuality. We have tried to present our ideas in an accessible and easy-to-use format, so that you can simply dip in and find something to use without too much fuss. Go on in and have a rummage.

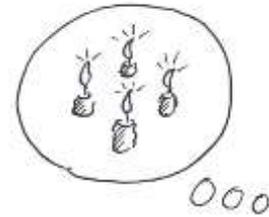
We have arranged these ideas under three headings:



Icebreakers, energisers, and games



Main Activities



Rituals and meditations

Each of our ideas and suggestions is explored under these headings:

- Title and description
- Goals
- Suitability
- Duration
- Resources
- Preparation
- Structure
- Variations
- Safety/welfare

Creating a religious education workshop or a session in the style of Bright Lights is about choosing a range of ingredients and combining them carefully to achieve the right flavour. We want to encourage you to pick and mix from the Aladdin's Cave section to make exciting sessions. You may like to choose an icebreaker, an activity, a game, and finally a ritual to finish. Always try to give your session shape and form, so that people can get to know each other first, then move on to a creative challenge, and finally end with something to help people to reflect and wind down.

Aladdin's Cave list

Icebreakers/energisers

Swap Chairs If...
 Birthday Order
 Smile Game
 Frogs, Flamingos, and Dead Ants
 Pulse Train
 Fruits, Vegetables, or Foods
 Be a Conductor...
 A-Z Game
 Clapping Game
 Song and Dance
 Giant Scissors/Paper/Stone
 Dog and Bone
 Animal Call
 Slo-mo Race
 Stormy Greeting

Main Activities

Collaborative Art
 Timeline of your Spiritual or Religious Life
 Bubble-gum Sculptures
 Trust Walk
 Giving and Receiving
 Exploring an Art Gallery or Postcards
 Choice Matrix
 Giant Puzzle Picture
 Map of Life
 Plant-Pot heads
 Talisman
 Funky Heads, Bodies, and Legs
 Let's Cheer
 Loud and Proud
 Be Aware Poster

Rituals and Meditations

Ball of Wool
 What Colour Are You?
 Newspaper Ritual/prayer
 Walking the Labyrinth
 A Wish Tree
 Appreciation Poster
 Creating our own Personalised Altar
 Today is Special Because
 Water Communion
 Walking Meditation
 "One Thing" Checkout Suggestions

Some suggested combinations of activities:

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Icebreaker	Swap Chairs If....	A-Z Game	Fruits, Vegetables, or Foods
Main Activity	Bubble-gum Sculptures	Time-line of Your Spiritual Life	Exploring Postcards
Ritual	Ball of Wool	What Colour Are You?	A Wish Tree

	Option 4	Option 5	Option 6
Icebreaker	Slo-mo Race	Greetings	Clapping Game
Main Activity	Talisman	Choice Matrix	Loud and Proud
Ritual	Today is Special Because ...	Water Communion	Walking Meditation

Icebreakers, energisers, and games



Swap Chairs If...

To bring movement and fun into the space and to introduce ourselves to each other in an enjoyable way

Goals: Spontaneity, playfulness, risk-taking, humour, honesty
Suitability: 6+ **Duration:** 5–30 minutes

Resources Chairs
Preparation Preferably indoors with chairs; but this can be played on the grass or beach, with participants sitting on the ground

Structure

- The group sit in the chairs with one volunteer to stand in the middle. The number of chairs should be one less than the number of participants: i.e. for a group of 12 people there should be 11 chairs.
- The volunteer calls out "Swap chairs if...you're wearing blue" or "..... if this is your first time in this place", or "..... if you like Harry Potter", or "..... if you consider yourself a Unitarian", etc.
- The volunteer calls out the first statement, and if anyone feels that they fit the statement they have to stand up and go and sit in a different chair. They cannot sit down in their original chair. The last person to find a chair remains in the middle and is next to say a "Swap chairs if..." statement.
- This game continues until people get tired and they have all found out about each other!

Variations Participants can be challenged to make statements that will get as many people to swap as possible; or make statements that are unique only to them and so no-one gets to change seats.

Safety/welfare Use sturdy chairs, as this game can get quite physical!



Birthday Order

Participants arrange themselves in order of birthdays – without talking

Goals: To encourage participants to share basic information about themselves and learn about one another

Suitability: All ages **Duration:** 5 minutes

Resources An area of floor or grass

Preparation None

Structure

- Announce to the group that you want them to stand up and organise themselves in order of birthday (not age!), with January birthdays at one end of the line and December birthdays at the other end
- Explain that they are invited to do this without words
- When the group have arranged themselves in a line, ask each person to say their birthday out loud, until everyone has shared their birthday
- If anyone turns out to be in an incorrect position, they can shuffle into the correct place

Variations There are many variations of this icebreaker. To make it easier for participants, they can use words. To make it harder, they can stand on chairs in a line, so that they have the extra challenge of passing one another without falling off the chair! The same exercise can be done for shoe size and likes/dislikes (on a spectrum from one extreme to another).

Safety/Welfare Take care with the standing-on-chairs variation: consider this possibility only if the group members have no mobility problems.



Smile Game

Participants are not allowed to smile. This usually generates a lot of laughter!

Goals: To encourage movement, trust, and eye contact in the group

Suitability: 5+

Duration: 5–10 minutes

Resources An area of floor space or lawn

Preparation None

Structure

- Ask people to sit down on the floor or on a seat somewhere in the room, facing in different directions
- Someone volunteers to go first. This person walks around the room trying to make any of the participants smile. No physical contact is allowed
- If this person is successful in making someone smile or laugh, then they take that person's place, and the person who has just smiled takes on the role of walking around the room getting people to smile
- If the person in the middle is not successful in getting anyone to smile, after a while they are allowed to "zap" a smile to someone of their choice, and then this person goes into the middle

Variations

Sleeping Lions: everyone lies down on the floor pretending to be asleep. The person in the middle goes around the room and tries to get someone to move. The person who is "caught" moving then joins the person in the middle in trying to spot the others moving.

Safety/welfare

Give people the opportunity to sit in a chair if they prefer.



Frogs, Flamingos, and Dead Ants

An elimination game involving music, dancing, and entertaining body shapes!

Goals To bring some movement, energy, and laughter into the space

Suitability: 6+

Duration: 10 minutes

Resources

The words "frogs", "flamingos", and "dead ants" written on separate small pieces of paper – say 5 of each – and shuffled in a mini deck of cards. A music system and a CD of some upbeat music.

Preparation Structure

Clear a good-sized area of floor and have the CD ready to play

- Explain to the group that some music will be played, and participants can dance around the room or move around in any way they like. When the music stops, they have to instantly "be" one of the three animals. Show them the three different body poses: frogs squat on the ground and hop, flamingoes stand on one leg and flap wings, while dead ants lie on their back and twitch! Each time a piece of paper will be randomly selected, and whichever animal is chosen (frog, flamingo, or dead ant), any participants who have opted for this animal are out of the game and have to sit around the perimeter and watch
- Allow the participants to try out the body shape of each animal before you start the game
- You can have a trial run, to give participants an idea of how the game works
- After each "elimination", the music starts again, to allow participants to move again before the music stops again and they have to decide which animal they want to be
- The last remaining people left in the space at the end may receive a prize

Variations

Other animal poses can be used. The group can be asked to think of their own selections before you start the game. This can be played several times, so that a number of people have the opportunity to "win". You could decide to stop the game when two or three people are still "surviving" in the middle, in order to make the game more inclusive.

Safety/welfare

Allow participants with limited mobility to sit on a chair or adopt more simple body shapes for each animal



Pulse Train

A game for two teams sitting down, with some physical contact

Goals: To encourage easy touch and team building, and create a sense of fun

Suitability: 7+ **Duration:** 15 minutes

Minimum 10 players

Resources Chairs, bunch of keys, coin

Preparation 2 rows of 5+ chairs facing each other. A small table equidistant from the two chairs at one end of the lines, with a bunch of keys placed on the table

Structure (see diagram below; F=Facilitator, K=Keys, O=Player)

- Participants sit in 2 teams on 2 rows of chairs with opposing pairs facing one another. Both teams hold hands with just with their own team mates
- At one end the facilitator gets a coin ready, and at the other end keys are placed on a small table between the two participants sitting at the end
- The players close their eyes, apart from the 2 people (A and B) sitting at the end of their line nearest the facilitator
- At the opposite end of the chairs from the table with the bunch of keys, the facilitator flips a coin to start the game. If the coin is heads, the 2 players squeeze the hand of the next player (who has their eyes closed) as soon as they can. If the coin is tails, they do not send a pulse
- The pulse is sent down the line of players on each side as soon as possible, until the players (C and D) on the end receive the pulse, and each tries to grab the keys as soon as they can
- The team that picks up the keys first wins that round. If one team sends a pulse and picks up the keys when the coin is tails, then it is the other team who did not succeed in picking up the keys win
- Whichever team wins each round moves up one chair; for example, if Team 1 wins, C would move to A's position, and everyone else moves towards the key table
- The activity continues until one team ends up in the same chairs as at the start of the game – and that team has won the game (see diagram)

Variations People can take turns to be the facilitator and the person to judge which team picks up the keys first. The object to pick up does not have to be a bunch of keys. Alternatives include a rattle, a shoe, or a ball.

Safety/welfare The facilitator needs to be sensitive to the fact that some people may not be comfortable with holding hands; therefore this game is more suitable for a group who have already got to know and trust each other. It can be pointed out that any form of contact between each person's hands can work: for example, fingers touching or hands on top of each other. People who don't want to take part can play the role of facilitator or judge.

Pulse Train: Notes and diagram

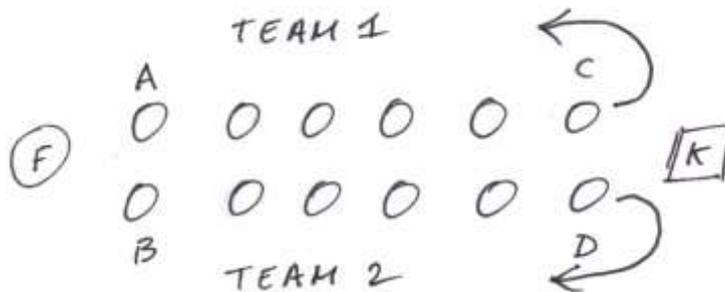
F flips the coin for players A and B, while all other team members have eyes closed. Players C and D pick up the keys only if they feel the pulse.

K = low table with bunch of keys

According to who wins each round C and D get up and move around the outside of the lines of chairs to replace player A or B. The players shuffle up so that the two people adjacent to the bunch of keys can go head to head.

The empty circles in the diagram represent the players sitting down on chairs facing each other – team 1 competing against team 2.

F = facilitator or judge





Fruits, Vegetables, or Foods

A name-learning game with plenty of fun thrown in

Goals: To learn each other's names, invite some movement and fun into the space, and make eye contact with each other

Suitability: 6+ **Duration:** 10 minutes

Catching skills would be a bonus!

Resources Three very soft balls or bean bags

Preparation None

Structure

- Group members form a circle
- Some is asked to say their own name and throw a ball to someone else in the circle. That person then says their own name and throws the ball to someone else. The facilitator reminds the group to make eye contact before throwing the ball to someone
- This is then repeated, but each time a participant throws a ball they say the name of the person they are passing it to
- This is repeated with two balls in play, then three. (When the third ball is introduced, it is more likely that people will drop the ball – this is all part of the fun!)
- The facilitator interrupts the activity and explains that each person now has to think of a name for themselves – either a vegetable, a fruit, or a food – beginning with the same letter as their own name; for example, a boy called Raj could choose to be called Radish or Rhubarb Crumble. If anyone struggles to think of a new name, the group can suggest alternatives
- Go around the circle so that each person can say their new name out loud
- Then the balls are thrown around the circle as before, but this time before passing the ball each person says the new name of the person (e.g. Radish), instead of the real name
- The game builds up to all three balls being passed, and the new names being used

Variations Other types of imaginary names can be suggested, such as countries of the world, famous people, or animals.

Safety/welfare Light balls or bean bags should be used, rather than hard balls. Participants should be reminded not to aim for people's faces.



Be a Conductor...

The group make a symphony with their voices

Goals To encourage creativity and teamwork

Suitability: 7+ **Duration:** 10 minutes or more

Resources An area of floor

Preparation None

Structure

- Someone volunteers to be the conductor. The others become the orchestra, and they arrange themselves in a semi-circle
- Each member of the group is invited to practise making a sound – the sound of their "instrument". This could be a deep pulsating sound, or a screech, or any noise really.
- After a short "rehearsal", the conductor has a go at conducting the players
- When the conductor points at a certain player, that person plays their instrument. Whole sections of the orchestra can be conducted. Volume can be controlled by the raising or lowering of the conductor's hands. The speed can also be varied
- The conductor can try to shape the sound so that it builds into a crescendo and then dies down to a natural end
- People can take it in turns to be the conductor and can also change their instruments or sounds if they wish

Variations This can be done in pairs, with the partners taking turns to be conductor or musician. Real percussion instruments might be played.

Safety/welfare A sound-proofed room may be an advantage.



A–Z Game

Participants race against each other to find things that begin with A–Z

Goals: To encourage teamwork and social interaction

Suitability: 7+

Duration: 15–30 minutes

Resources

Access to indoor and outdoor objects is an advantage, but not essential

Preparation

None

Structure

- Divide the participants into teams of 2–6. (This can be done randomly, or you could use quirky methods such as shoe size or height)
- Set them the challenge of finding things that begin with A–Z (either in the room or outdoors if you have access). People can use items of clothing, jewellery, furniture, the contents of wallets or handbags, etc!). Each item is found and then laid down in order from A to Z – for example, an arm* for A, a bracelet for B, and a comb for C – until the team has an object lined up for each letter of the alphabet (*in this case the player would need to remain on the floor and place their arm in place!)
- The team that completes this challenge first is the winner
- The leader checks that every letter between A and Z has been covered. Sometimes people have to be quite imaginative and think in the abstract, such as putting down X-ray specs for X or doing a zebra impression for Z. This can cause some hilarity!

Variations

Ask the teams to spell out a word or name instead of A–Z, such as UNITARIAN.

Safety/welfare

Remind participants that they should not lift any heavy objects or move any object from outdoors that shouldn't be shifted or touched.



Clapping Name Game

Learn each other's names using the "We will rock you" rhythm

Goals: Have fun with sound while learning people's names

Suitability: All ages **Duration:** 15 minutes

Resources None

Preparation None

Structure

- Form a circle. Explain the activity to everyone
- Begin the rhythm by clapping twice and then holding up your arms
- In the pause where arms are held up, say your name
- Staying in the rhythm, go around the circle so that everyone gets to say their name in the pause (e.g. clap, clap, "Pete")
- Then say your name and someone else's name in the pause (e.g. clap, clap, "Pete, Jenny")
- That person then has to say their own name and someone else's in the pause (clap, clap, "Jenny, Bob")
- Continue until everyone has had a chance to say their name

Variations

Choose a different well-known rhythm, or make one up.
When each person says their name, they could do a dance pose that everyone has to copy.

Safety/welfare

Be aware of those around you: not too loud!



Song and Dance

Sing a few well-known songs with actions to break the ice

Goals: Enjoy singing and moving together

Suitability: All ages **Duration:** 10 minutes

Resources None, unless you have a musician who could accompany the singing

Preparation Recruiting and briefing the musician (optional)

Structure

- Choose a well-known children's song; for example, "Hokey-Cokey", "Heads, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes", "Old MacDonald", or "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round"
- If participants are unfamiliar with the song, you may want to teach the first part of it before singing it all the way through
- Sing the song and encourage participants to join in with the actions
- End with a round of applause!

Variations Get participants to think of new words or actions for the songs.

Safety/welfare Some participants might get over-excited and rush into the centre for "Oh, hokey-cokey", so ensure that more fragile participants are protected.



Giant Scissors/Paper/Stone

Play in two teams, miming Stone/Paper/Scissors instead of using your hands

Goals: Encourage teamwork and decision making

Suitability: All, but small children will need supervision

Duration: 15 minutes

Resources None

Preparation None

Structure

- Divide the group into two teams
- Explain that they will play the game Stone/Paper/Scissors and tell them the rules: Stone blunts Scissors, Scissors cut Paper, and Paper covers Stone
- As a group, agree on an action to represent each character; e.g. Scissors could be arms slapping together
- In their teams, participants secretly consult on which action they will use
- On the count of three, all the participants do their action
- The team wins based on the rules in step 2 (e.g. Stone blunts Scissors etc.)
- Teams play 'best of three' or 'best of five' rounds, depending on the time available.

Variations

The winning team runs towards the losing team to tag them. Any tagged members have to join the winning team for the next round.

Make up your own characters instead of Stone, Paper, and Scissors: e.g. Wizards, Dwarves, and Ogres, or Elephants, Cats, and Spiders.

Safety/welfare

If participants run around, ensure there are no hazards and that play is kept safe.



Dog and Bone

A game for two teams in which a player from each team tries to be the first to get the "bone" (a paper cup)

Goals: Encourage team bonding in an energising way

Suitability: All ages, **Duration:** 15 minutes
but small children will need supervision

Resources A paper cup or similar item which can be grabbed easily; chairs; space to move

Preparation None

Structure

- Divide the group into two teams and explain the rules of the game
- The two teams stand in a line facing each other at a distance of about 4m apart
- A "bone" is placed in the centre. It can be put on a chair if people don't want to bend down to reach it
- Each member of the team has a number
- When you call a number, the two members with that number (one from each team) run to try to grab the bone first
- The winning member receives a point for their team
- The bone is put back in place, and the members return to their place in each line
- The first team to reach 10 points wins

Variations After a few rounds, tell members that they need to grab the bone and run back to their place in the line. Introduce a new rule whereby the member who didn't grab the bone first can get the bone if they tag the other member before they make it back to their place; this adds an element of strategy, as it may be easier to tag someone than to be the first person to grab the bone.

Safety/welfare Ensure that the playing area is clear of any clutter which might cause a fall. Discourage rough play.



Animal Call

A game in which people have to find their partner by making the noise of an animal

Goals: Get people to break the ice and form pairs at random

Suitability: All ages, especially a lively outgoing group

Resources Space to move; slips of paper with pictures or names of animals on each slip

Preparation Draw or write the name of the same animal on two slips of paper. Make enough pairs for each person to have a slip. If there is an odd number, ensure that one animal is written on three slips of paper.

Structure

- Hand out the slips of paper
- Tell everyone that someone else is the same animal as them
- Ask everyone to call out with their animal's noise as they walk slowly around the space, trying to find their partner
- When people have found their partner, they can stop making the noise
- The activity ends when everyone has found their partner

Variations If it's a very large group, you could prepare teams of animals (3 or 4 people) rather than pairs. When they have found each other, they hold on to each other until they have found all their team mates. With older children and adults, these teams can try to find each other with their eyes closed for an extra challenge!

Safety/welfare Be aware that this game can be noisy, which may be uncomfortable for some. Be especially mindful to clear away clutter if asking people to attempt this game with their eyes closed.



Slo-mo Race

A "race" where you pretend you're in a slow-motion video to get to the other side of the room

Goals: Use gentle movement to loosen up and break down barriers

Suitability: All ages **Duration:** 10 minutes

Resources

Space to move; string/ribbon for start and finish lines

Preparation

Lay out the start and finishing lines (or choose to race from one side of the room to the other); provide a small prize (optional)

Structure

- Explain to the group that this is an unusual race, in which style is more important than speed
- Ask everyone to line up at the starting line and tell them that when you say "Go" they must "run" to the finish line in slow motion, and you will judge the most graceful mover to be the winner
- Say "Ready, get set, go!" to start the race
- When everyone has reached the finish line, gather them together to announce the winner
- You may offer the winner a small / homemade prize

Variations

Make it a walking race where the *fastest* person wins – so that at least one foot is always in contact with the ground.

Safety/welfare

Ensure that the race area is clear of obstacles.



Stormy Greeting

Build a gentle clap like raindrops to a thunderous round of applause

Goals: Encourage participation and appreciation

Suitability: All ages **Duration:** 5 minutes

Resources A small space (people can sit or stand)

Preparation None

Structure

- Explain that clapping is one way to show your appreciation for someone or something, and that you are going to start very quietly and get louder and louder
- Begin with one-finger-on-palm clapping, like gentle raindrops
- Then use two or three fingers, building to a full clap
- Build up to a thunderous round of applause with stamping, whooping, and cheering!

Variations When you've been through the activity once, you can ask people to name things that they like or appreciate and choose a level of applause to use

Safety/welfare Be aware that loud noises might be upsetting for some people

Main Activities



Collaborative Art

A range of art exercises in which participants have to work together

Goals: To encourage communication and trust between people

Suitability: 7+

Duration: 10–30 minutes

Resources

Paper, newspaper, felt tips, paint, and surfaces to work on

Preparation

Set out tables covered with newspaper and provide a sheet of paper (cartridge or sugar paper)

Structure

- Participants pair up and sit opposite a sheet of paper. They take turns to draw something – one mark at a time. This is done in silence, so there is no discussion about what is being drawn. Use felt-tip pens
- Step by step a picture emerges; sometimes it will resemble something, while other times it will appear completely abstract
- After a few minutes another picture can be created, using a similar process; the other person might start it
- Afterwards the pair can discuss what picture was made and their experience of the activity. What did it feel like, drawing a picture with someone else and not knowing what it would be? Did anyone take the lead, or did the roles feel completely equal?

Variations

There are many variations and developments of this activity:

1. The marks can be made randomly by each person, rather than in turns like a tennis game
2. The two people can put their hands on *one* felt tip and attempt a drawing. Again this is done in silence
3. The participants sit around a table. Each person has a sheet of paper (A3 is good for this) in front of them. They have one minute to make marks or images on their paper, using felt tips, oil pastels, or paint. After the minute is up, the sheets of paper are rotated around the table in a clockwise direction, so that each person receives a piece of paper from their right. They have one minute to add any marks they wish. Urge participants to be positive in what they add and not cross out or obliterate any marks made by a previous person. This continues so that each sheet of paper is passed around the table, and the original artist is reunited with their piece of paper. At the end each sheet of paper will have been drawn on by all participants
4. Key questions to ask: "How was that for you? What strikes you about the look of the final pictures?"
5. A giant sheet of paper is created by sticking together smaller sheets. The group have some time to paint or make a collage with any colours or patterns, but without any discussion or planning! Participants can work on any part of the paper and move around. Follow this with a discussion about what the experience was like.

Safety/welfare

All these activities can bring up a lot of feelings for people. It is important that you give people an opportunity to share their experiences before moving on. They can do this in pairs or with the whole group. Big questions and issues can come up, such as: "Who was in control? Who preferred to be led? Did you mind if someone drew over your area of paper? Did you find it liberating not knowing what the image would be – or worrying?"



Timeline of your Spiritual or Religious Life

Participants draw a line, map, or diagram of their faith journey

Goals: To foster self-awareness and reflection, and give people an opportunity to share something about their religious life or search for meaning

Suitability: 12+ **Duration:** 30–60 minutes

Resources

These can be kept simple, such as felt tips and oil pastels; or participants could use collage or even paint

Preparation

Some time for reflection or meditation for participants to think about their faith journey and visit the key turning points and highlights. Paper and materials need to be set up beforehand, so that when people are ready to draw there is a minimum of disruption

Structure

- Participants are led in a visualisation by means of which they can revisit some important times in their life when their spiritual life or inner life was shaped or developed
- The members are asked to draw a timeline of this journey. It might be a simple labelled diagram (based on a range of shapes – from linear line to spiral), showing the main turning points and discoveries; or it might be a more elaborate image, such as a collage incorporating images from magazines. Words and cartoons can be incorporated, or the image can be kept abstract and entirely made up of colours
- It is important to allow time for sharing and reflection afterwards. This activity can prompt some powerful emotional reactions, so sharing in pairs may be more supportive and relaxing than speaking in front of the whole group. Questions to consider: "Were there any Eureka moments or times of revelation? How did your childhood experiences of religion shape your spiritual life now? Who made a big impact on you? Are there any surprises or learning points from this exercise?"

Variations

Participants create a mime representing their faith journey or search for meaning.

Safety/welfare

It is important to give participants the freedom to explore this activity in the way that they choose.



Bubble-Gum Sculptures

Participants make miniature creations out of bubble gum and toothpicks

Goals: To express our creativity and to generate some fun

Suitability: 7+

Duration: 20–30 minutes

Resources

A piece of bubble gum and a paper plate for each person; a box of toothpicks

Preparation

None

Structure

- Give everyone in the group some bubble gum and a paper plate. They can start chewing the gum while you explain the activity
- When people have achieved a nicely chewed piece of gum (after a few minutes), they are requested to place it on their paper plate
- The challenge is for each person to create a mini sculpture with their blob of bubble gum and toothpicks (you can agree on a certain number of toothpicks, e.g. 3 each)
- Set them a specific length of time to make their sculptures – say 10 minutes?
- The activity can be finished by asking each person to say something about their creation. And/or there can be a judging ceremony, with a prize for the winner

Variations

1. Participants can work individually, in pairs or groups.
2. Other materials can be utilised, such as elastic bands, paper clips, or post-it notes.
3. A certain theme can be chosen as a focus, such as a chalice, a symbol of peace, a portrait of a famous person.

Safety/welfare

People who would prefer not to chew bubble gum can sculpt with Blu Tack instead (obviously they don't chew it!). Blu Tack could be used by everyone, but it is not as sticky and easily moulded as bubble gum. If using bubble gum, remind people to be careful not to drop it on the floor or get it in their hair or on clothes. Paper towels or wet wipes can be used to clean hands afterwards.



Trust Walk

People pair up. One person is the navigator, while the partner is blindfolded.

Goals: To generate trust and gentle touch

Suitability: 12+

Duration: 20–30 minutes

Resources

Items that can be used as a blindfold, such as scarves or towels.
Indoor or outdoor area.

Preparation

This exercise is difficult to do with strangers, so a certain amount of time needs to be taken for people to build connections.

Structure

- Explain the activity carefully before anyone begins
- Pair up the participants. Each pair decides who will be the navigator first and who will wear the blindfold
- The challenge is for the navigator to lead their blindfolded partner on a short walk – say 5 minutes. It is advisable for the blindfolded person to hold on to the arm of the navigator and allow the navigator to be the leader
- The pair swap roles
- Some time for reflection is usually crucial. This can be done in the same pair or with the whole group. Some key questions: "What role did you feel most comfortable with – the navigator or the blindfolded person? What were the main challenges for each role?"

Variations



1. The navigator can introduce their partner to a few different textures along the way, such as a leaf, flower, or fir cone. The blindfolded person can have a go at guessing the different objects.
2. The navigator can choose a number of specific views or "snapshots" to show their partner, such as the view of a tree trunk, a spider's web, or a part of the sky. At key moments the navigator asks their partner to remove the blindfold and look intensely at a view for a minute, using a simple viewfinder (a square or rectangular hole cut into a sheet of plain paper).
4. After the activity the blindfolded person can do some creative writing, or make a piece of art based on the experience of looking at various sights or touching various objects.

Safety/welfare

This activity can prove a powerful and emotional experience for some people. The opt-out rule should be applied (i.e. people don't have to take part). The facilitator may decide to make some areas off limits in order to keep this exercise safe. It may be a good idea for all participants to become briefly acquainted with the main areas to be covered by this activity, whether outdoors or indoors, in order to prevent nasty shocks involving potholes or traffic. Being blindfolded may prove too challenging for some people. Perhaps they can be asked to close their eyes instead of wearing a blindfold.



Giving and Receiving

Group members draw images exploring a theme, and then these images are distributed spontaneously

Goals: To encourage creativity and trust

Suitability: 14+

Duration: 30–45 minutes

Resources

A3 drawing paper; oil pastels (or a range of other art materials). If you decide to do collages, provide a pile of magazines and newspapers with scissors and glue.

Preparation

Set out the art materials. Use newspaper to protect tables.

Structure

- Choose an uplifting or inspiring theme on which the group will create a piece of art. For example: make an image that would give encouragement to a passer-by or traveller; or an image expressing peace; or a picture which communicates a warm welcome. Explain to the participants that they can work abstractly (using only colours and shapes), or figuratively; they can respond to the theme in any way they like. Collage can be a good approach. Use materials that are simple and direct to use. Stress to the group that they are making this image for someone in the world, but not a specific person, and that they will need to give it away
- Give the group members 20–40 minutes to make this image
- The images are then collected in by the leader and spread out on the floor, facing upwards. Participants sit around the gallery of images in chairs. Make sure that the number of people matches the number of images. (The leader may like to have a spare picture on standby, in case one of the participants doesn't finish or decides to withdraw their piece of art)
- Go into a ritual space now. The leader invites participants to pick up an image one by one and give it to someone else in the group. It is suggested that they do this without too much deliberation or thought
- One by one the images are distributed
- Occasionally a participant will receive their own image back
- When the images have all been shared, it is important to have some time for sharing and discussion. This exercise is very simple, but it can provoke a lot of emotional responses. Issues that often come up are trust, vulnerability, self-worth, and anxiety about "getting it right". Both the making and the giving and receiving can provoke feelings for people. Allow enough time for everyone to speak if they wish

Variations

This making, giving, and receiving activity can be practised with almost any type of art or craft material. It can work well with homemade friendship bracelets. The images can be put face down on the floor, or rolled up and tied with ribbon and put into a "hat". This will make the giving and receiving less personalised.

Safety/welfare

Allow plenty of time for this activity to be processed. You may wish to pair up the participants before the whole-group sharing, so that people have the opportunity to share just with one person.



Exploring an Art Gallery or Postcards

Participants take a good look at a range of images and choose one that has resonance for them

Goals: To have some time of meditation, to enable people to find some insights, and to create a time of fellowship and sharing

Suitability: 14+ **Duration:** 60 minutes +

Resources An art gallery (!) with a diverse range of paintings or sculptures; or a range of postcards. The postcards, if used, should represent a wide range – from traditional to modern art, and from figurative to abstract

Preparation If the group is visiting an art gallery, you may need to book beforehand, or at least state that you will be bringing a self-led group

Structure

- If you are visiting an art gallery, make sure you choose a time that isn't too busy. Gather the group in a circle and prepare them for the looking exercise. They will have 30–45 minutes to walk around and take a look at the exhibits and notice which pieces engage them the most. They are encouraged to choose one and meditate with it for 5–10 minutes in silence. If possible, they should not read any information about the piece they are looking at, in order to prevent it from becoming an intellectual exercise
- The participants re-group at a chosen time and are invited to show their selected piece of art to the others. The group looks at each artefact in silence – for around 2 minutes. The person who chose the piece then shares any observations or feelings that occurred to them. The group can then offer their own reflections. The leader may ask some relevant questions, such as "What drew you to this work? What connections does it have with your life? Did anything surprise you as you looked at it closely?"
- When everyone who wants to do so has presented their chosen piece, the activity is brought to a close

Variations A selection of postcards or images can be used as an alternative. These can be spread out on tables for the group to look at. Each participant chooses an image and sits with it for a while. Then they pair up and share their observations and connections with the image.

Safety/welfare Be aware that in a public space the process of a group looking at works of art and sharing personal reflections can be challenging. If you have a large group (say more than 12), you may wish to divide into two groups.



Choice Matrix

Find out each other's opinions by standing on different parts of a grid

Goals: Get to know each other's opinions

Suitability: 12+

Duration: 20 minutes

Resources

6m of string or rope; pen and cards or labels to stick on the floor

Preparation

Lay out two 3m pieces of string to form a cross. Label the ends of the vertical axis *Love* and *Hate*, and the ends of the horizontal axis *A Lot* and *Never*

Structure

- Explain to the group that you are going to find out what they like and don't like
- Say you are going to give them some activities, and they should think about whether they really love them or hate them or are neutral about them. They should also think whether they have done that activity a lot, or never, or somewhere in between
- After introducing each activity, prompt the participants to find a place on the grid
- They might really love something but haven't done much of it, so they would be in the *Love and Never* section, or they may have done loads of it but don't really like it, so they would be in the *A Lot and Hate* section
- Some activity examples: building sandcastles, singing, sleeping, running

Variations

1. Change the axis labels: *High energy/Relaxing, Happy/Sad, Agree/Disagree*.
2. Simplify the grid into a 'Line of Opinion', asking people to place themselves on the line between strongly agreeing and strongly disagreeing, with no other axis.

Safety/welfare

Ensure that people can't trip over the rope; warn them of that possibility.



Giant Puzzle Picture

Make a giant picture by getting everyone to contribute one part of it

Goals: Explore ways to collaborate on a creative project

Suitability: All ages, **Duration:** 30 minutes – 1 hour
although the very young need to be supervised

Resources Sheets of A4 paper and coloured pens/crayons

Preparation

- Lay out an A4 sheet for everyone, enough to form one big sheet
- Draw a large, simple picture such as a chalice, a tree, or a house which fills the big sheet
- Number each sheet on the grid so you will be able to easily collate them again
- In pencil, write W (for warm) on the object in the picture, and C (for cool) on the background of each of the A4 sheets. e.g. W on all the parts of the tree and C on the blank background.
- Place the sheets in a pile so that the participants can't see what the original design was
- Optional: divide the coloured pens into warm (red, orange, yellow) and cool (blue, green, grey) colours

Structure

- Hand out a sheet of paper to each person
- Explain that they are going to make a mystery piece of art
- Ask them to identify which parts of their picture say W and which say C
- Explain that this means warm and cool colours, and give examples of these colours
- Ask them to decorate their sheets with doodles, pictures, or blocks of colour in whichever way they want; but they must use cool and warm colours according to the markings
- When everyone has completed their colouring in, get the group to re-assemble the sheets according to the numbers and see what they have made

Variations Use paint or stickers to decorate the picture; but be aware that the more contrast between the cool and warm colours, the better

Safety/welfare Use safe/non-toxic art materials



Map of Life

Draw a gingerbread person decorated to show your personality

Goals: Express your personality through your creativity

Suitability: All ages; **Duration:** 20 minutes
young children will
need supervision

Resources

Table, chairs, paper, and coloured pens/crayons

Preparation

You may wish to draw the outline of the gingerbread person and photocopy it beforehand

Structure

- Hand out sheets of paper
- If the sheets are not pre-prepared, ask people to draw a thick outline of a gingerbread person on the page
- Fill each part of the gingerbread person with pictures and words about what makes a person special:
 - Head: thoughts and opinions
 - Arms: skills
 - Body/heart: emotions
 - Legs: physical activities
 - Feet: family/roots
- Pin up all the pictures and ask some of the people to explain what they have drawn

Variations

As well as drawing, use magazine pictures and glue to create a collage.

Safety/welfare

Use safe/non-toxic art materials.



Plant-pot Heads

Decorate a yoghurt pot with a face or patterns, and plant with seed

Goals: Create a gift and learn about growth

Suitability: All ages **Duration:** 30 minutes

Resources Yoghurt pots; paper and glue or white sticky labels; clear tape or sticky-backed plastic; coloured pens; stickers; soil, fast-growing seeds (e.g. cress or sunflowers)

Preparation Lay out all the materials on a table in order as listed above

Structure

- Begin with a brief discussion about what is needed to make something grow
- Ensure that everyone has a pot and some paper or labels; ask them to cover the pot in labels, or glue the paper over the surface
- Encourage them to decorate their pot to express their personality, using the pens and stickers available
- After decorating, cover the pot with tape or plastic
- Carefully fill the decorated pot with damp soil
- Plant the seed

Variations Make a chart and record the progress of the seedlings every few days or every week.
Use empty egg shells or other containers instead of yoghurt pots.

Safety/welfare Ensure that all surfaces are protected against mess.



Talisman

Create a good-luck charm and decorate a box to keep it in

Goals: Create something to remind people of their spiritual community, and a chance for them to wish each other well

Suitability: All ages **Duration:** 30 minutes

Resources For each person: a bead, seed, or charm; empty matchbox or other container; slips of paper; labels or glue; coloured pens/crayons

Preparation Lay all the materials out. Cover the matchboxes in blank labels or paper (optional)

Structure

- Begin with a brief discussion about good-luck charms or things that might remind us of our community
- Explain that they will each be making a special charm and will decorate a box for it
- Participants should each write a wish on their slip of paper
- Then choose a 'talisman' (bead/shell, etc.)
- Cover a matchbox with paper/labels (if you have not already done this in advance)
- Use the pens and stickers to decorate the matchbox
- This activity works best when used with a closing ritual; for example, set up an altar, say one thing about the process (not about the charm itself), then take home their own charm. See also 'Giving and Receiving' in the Rituals section

Variations Ask participants to make a charm for another member of the group (make this clear before they begin the task, so they don't expect to keep their own charm!).
Make worry-dolls from matchsticks and thread; keep them in a decorated matchbox.

Safety/welfare



Funky Heads, Bodies, and Legs

Create strange and wonderful creatures by drawing together

Goals: Show how you can make something surprising by working together

Suitability: Age 5+; **Duration:** 30 minutes

the younger children
will need supervision

Resources

Paper, coloured pencils/pens, scissors

Preparation

Make wide strips of paper by folding A4 paper in half lengthways and cutting it. Allow one per person.

Structure

- Give everyone a piece of paper and a selection of coloured pencils/pens
- Ask everyone to draw a head at the top of their strip of paper, leaving two vertical lines for the neck
- They then fold the paper down a few times to cover the head, but leave the neck lines showing
- Then they pass the paper to the next person, who draws the body and arms as far as the waist/hips. They should fold the paper down, leaving lines for the waist/hips to be drawn by the next person
- They continue passing the papers around to complete the legs (leaving lines for the ankles) and finally the feet
- When the person picture is complete, it should be passed on so that the next person can look and give it a name and a catchphrase
- Put all the rolled-up papers in the middle of the circle and get everyone to choose one at random. Go around the circle so that everyone can present the creature that they picked to the rest of the group

Variations

Easier: just do the drawing, leaving out the name and catchphrase.

Harder: discuss how these different characters might interact with each other; even do a little roleplay/scene with some of them.

Safety/welfare

Keep scissors away from small children.



Let's Cheer

Devise a lively cheer to call out or sing together

Goals: Create a sense of teamwork and group identity

Suitability: All ages, with adult supervision where required
Duration: 15–30 minutes, depending on group size and how complex you decide to make the task

Resources Pen and paper – useful but not essential

Preparation None

Structure

- This activity works best with 6–10 people, so you may want to divide a large group into teams
- Tell the group that they have 10 minutes to come up with a cheer. It can be sung or spoken. It can be linked to the theme of the session, or it may give the group an identity when it is first formed. Give them some examples ("*1, 2, 3, we are unity!*" or "*Living freedom is our goal, Love and justice make us whole*")
- The group perform their cheer. It could be accompanied by actions or a dance

Variations This activity could be done by a small group while others are doing other activities; then the "cheer group" presents their cheer to the others.

Safety/welfare Be aware of any hazards if actions/dance moves are used.



Loud and Proud

Discuss reasons to be proud of yourself

Goals: Encourage people to recognise their inner strengths and support each other

Suitability: 5+

Duration: 20–30 minutes

Resources

Pens and paper

Preparation

Make pens and paper available if people want them

Structure

- Give everyone a few minutes to think about three reasons why they are proud of themselves as individuals
- They might want to write down their answers
- Divide them into groups of three or four to discuss what they came up with; allow 10–15 minutes for this
- In the larger group, ask if there were any surprises, or anything people found that they had in common

Variations

This can be a powerful exercise, especially for people who don't often think of themselves in this way. It may be useful to have time for people to write a "journal" about their feelings after the discussion; or allow time for them to debrief (discuss their feelings on a one-to-one basis).

Safety/welfare

Be aware that some people may feel sensitive after this activity.



Be Aware Poster

Make a poster linked to the theme of the session

Goals: Encourage deeper thinking about the theme and check people's understanding of the theme

Suitability: 5+

Duration: 20–30 minutes

Resources
Preparation

A3 or A4 Paper, colouring pens, magazine pictures, glue
Protect tables with newspaper or tablecloths. Set up the craft materials to make them accessible

Structure

- Have a brief discussion about the issue or theme
- Ask everyone, either individually or in pairs, to design a poster which will raise awareness of the issue

Variations

Ask the pairs to suggest their own campaign issues which they would like to raise awareness about. This can work well if the theme is about social justice and earlier in the session you have given examples of social-action projects.

Safety/welfare

Extra explanation and encouragement may be necessary for the younger ones.



Picture Scavenger Hunt

Collect creative images using a digital camera or smartphone to tell a story

Goals: To have some time of meditation; to encourage people to find some insights; and to create a time of fellowship and sharing

Suitability: 6+, with supervision from adults **Duration:** 60 minutes

Resources

Each team needs a way to take a photo: a digital camera, or a smartphone, or a tablet. The whole group will need access to a laptop and printer, or a laptop, projector, and screen

Preparation

Ensure that each team has a camera and a list of images to collect, and a USB lead to connect the camera to the laptop

Structure

- Get people to form small groups of 3 or 4
- Give them a list of three things to "collect". The things could be physical or conceptual: for example, Happiness, Water, Light, Bitterness
- The idea is that they create an image for each of these things and then take a photo on their smartphone or camera. This should take 20–30 minutes
- Then, if possible, load all the images on to a laptop and display them on a projector screen; or print out the images and display them in your worship space

Variations

If they don't have the technology, they could make the picture by drawing or creating a collage.

For older children and adults, you could ask each team to make up a story which includes all three images.

Safety/welfare

Ensure that younger children are supervised, especially when handling fragile equipment, or if the group will be out and about.

Rituals and Meditations

Ball of Wool Ritual



A ball of wool is passed between participants, and there are opportunities to share and make connections

Goals: To celebrate a sense of community and belonging

Suitability: 8+

Duration: 10–30 minutes

Resources

A ball of wool or string (preferably a colourful ball with a number of different colours woven in). An open area of floor or a suitable space outdoors

Preparation

Arrange chairs in a circle if the participants need to sit

Structure

- People stand or sit in a circle. One person holds the ball of wool and throws or passes it across to someone in the circle, while keeping hold of the end of the wool. When throwing the ball, the person will identify aloud something that they appreciate about belonging to the group; or something that they want to celebrate; or something that they appreciate about the other person to whom they are throwing the ball (agree the type of question or statement in advance)
- The ball continues to be thrown from person to person until everyone is holding on to the piece of wool
- This ritual can now be done in reverse, with another question or statement, or in silence. The original person should end up with the ball of wool

Variations

When everyone is holding on to the ball of wool, a pair of scissors can be passed around, and the wool can be cut so that each person has a length of it, for the person next to them to tie around their neighbour's wrist. The ritual can be slowed down further by words and meditations shared on the theme of oneness and community.

Safety/welfare

Be aware of the mobility of participants in throwing and catching the ball of wool. Be careful when small children are handling scissors.



What Colour Are You?

Participants share what colour they feel they are in this moment

Goals: To give people an opportunity to be present and to be heard in the group

Suitability: 14+

Duration: 10 minutes (depending on size of group)

Resources

A range of sheets of coloured paper and readings about colour may be used, but are not essential

Preparation

Arrange chairs in a circle

Structure

- Ask the question: "If you were a colour right now, what colour would you be?" Hold some silence, so group members can consider this question for a few moments
- One by one the participants say their colour out loud, if they are happy to do so. This can be done in order, or "popcorn" style – whereby people say their colour when the mood takes them (this approach can take longer)
- The ritual is finished when everyone has had a chance to share their colour

Variations

This activity can be used as a check in or check out – to see how participants are feeling.

A range of coloured paper or fabrics can be set out to act as a stimulus.

Readings or meditations can be shared at the start or at the end of the activity. A good one is John O' Donohue's "Beannacht" from *Anam Cara*.

Safety/welfare

None



Newspaper Ritual/Prayer

Participants read out quotes or sentences from articles as a form of meditation

Goals: To reflect on the diversity of human experiences and have some time for prayer and stillness

Suitability: 12+

Duration: 30 minutes to prepare and 15 minutes to share

Resources

Today's newspapers and scissors

Preparation

The group spends some time looking through the newspapers and looking for suitable quotes

Structure

- It is remarkable how quotes from newspapers can sound prayerful and poignant when read out loud. Ask people to look through a paper and choose one or two short statements or quotes
- They can copy them out or make a mark on the page. Examples from today's paper include: "Because of our work, I know I have a place among the people as well as in their heart. If I didn't have a place there, I would be scared of my shadow, but I am never afraid" "His sculpture is as much about human ingenuity as it is about the forms themselves. It is as if the forms he finds are discovered in the complex processes by which they are made. What strange and often exhilarating things they are" "I survived by eating fish, birds and turtles", Pacific castaway says" ... "A lion dance during Chinese New Year interrupts trading in the Philippines stock exchange, where prices closed down 0.43%"
- In some cases the lack of clear context or explanation makes these short statements more intriguing and fascinating
- When each participant has chosen one or two quotes, there should be a meditational space for the words to be shared. Either people can read their own snippet, or one person can read them all. It may be helpful for the participants to be given a number, so that they know when it is their turn
- The meditation is brought to a close when everyone has shared their words

Variations

The same approach can be used with poetry books or novels. Specific lines can be found and read out without explanation.

Safety/welfare

None



Walking the Labyrinth

An easy way of bringing the labyrinth experience to a group

Goals: To make prayer and meditation more accessible and physical for people

Suitability: 7+

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Resources

Masking tape or gaffer tape; some meditative words; candles; soft toys; flowers

Preparation

Put chairs or cushions into a large circle. Make a labyrinth pattern on the floor with the tape. It can be asymmetrical and simple. It needs to have an entrance and a central sanctuary. In this sanctuary you can place lighted candles, flowers, or toys to provide some focus. You can see simple shapes of labyrinths on the internet

Structure

- Find your own words to introduce labyrinths. Explain that they are an ancient sacred pattern for pilgrims to follow and meditate in. Pilgrims walk or shuffle on their knees slowly and mindfully, find the centre, pause for reflection and solace, and then find their way out again
- Try to create a quiet and reflective atmosphere; you might use music to do this. After explaining the concept of the labyrinth, invite people to enter one by one and slowly follow the tape into the middle, spend time in the middle, and take the journey back out again
- Encourage them to think mindfully about each step as if it were their last, and to be respectful of other travellers in the labyrinth
- Younger children can be invited to choose a soft toy in the centre and sit with it for a few minutes, to think of a name for it and to "make friends". A plate of simple food can be placed in the middle, such as slices of banana or grapes
- When participants have walked the labyrinth, they are encouraged to sit down and reflect

Variations

There can be many variations. Objects can be placed in the middle for participants to connect with: flowers, pebbles, or shells, for example. Music can be played as an introduction and/or an ending.

Safety/welfare

How might the labyrinth be accessible to those in wheelchairs? The pathway can be widened and the central space made larger. Be careful about lighted candles in the sanctuary, as these can be a fire hazard.



A Wish Tree

Write wishes on leaf-shaped pieces of card and hang them on a tree

Goals: To enable people of all ages to participate and to pray in a physical way

Suitability: 7+

Duration: 20 minutes

Resources

A "tree" placed on a table: a potted rubber plant or an interesting branch, for example. Small leaf shapes cut out of green card. Pens or pencils. Clothes pegs for hanging leaves on the branches. A basket or container for the leaves

Preparation Structure

Place the tree in position and prepare the leaf shapes

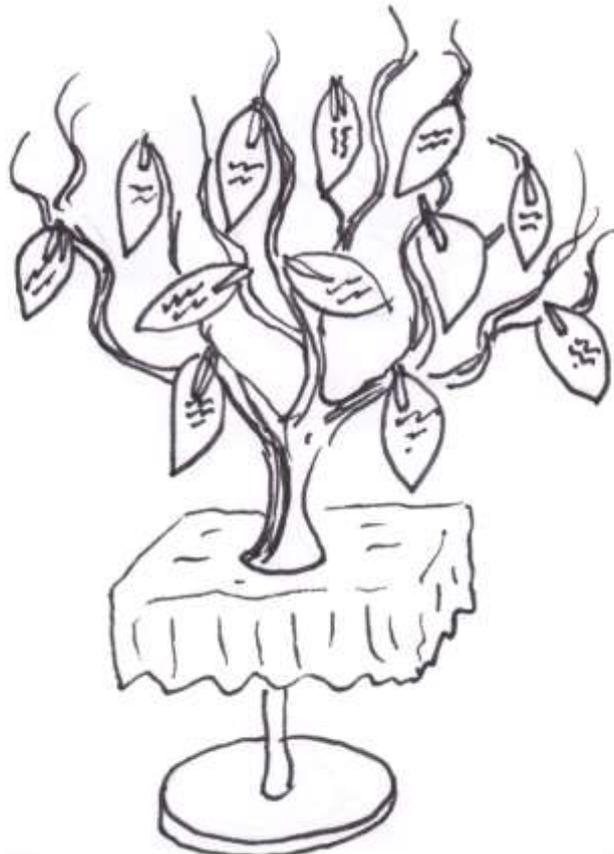
- Invite participants to write a wish or a prayer on a one of the leaves. They can be passed around in a wicker basket, together with the pens. Allow some silence while people do this
- One by one, participants can come up to the tree and attach their leaf to a branch. Invite them to read and appreciate other statements, and ponder on them for a few minutes
- The ritual can be brought to a close with a reading or poem about trees

Variations

If space is an issue, then a two-dimensional tree can be cut out and fixed to the wall, and the leaves can be stuck on with Blu Tack. The wishes and prayers may be read out loud anonymously at the end; but if you opt for this, participants must be warned before the ritual that their statements will be read out

Safety/welfare

None





Appreciation Poster

Create a poster for each individual, including special messages from the rest of the group

Goals: To create a bond in the group and highlight each person's positive attributes

Suitability: 5+

Duration: 30 minutes

Resources

A4 paper, coloured pens/pencils, stickers

Preparation

Lay out the materials to make them accessible

Structure

- Give everyone a piece of paper and get them to write or draw their name in the centre, leaving plenty of space around the outside for other people's messages. They are the "owner" of their own poster
- Ask everyone to pass their poster to the left. The next person then writes a message, decorates the poster with a sticker or draws a picture to show why they appreciate the person whose name is on the poster. Continue to pass the posters to the left, so that everyone has a chance to write/draw on all the posters
- When the final person has written their message, the poster should be placed in the middle of the circle or placed face down in front of the owner
- Each person is handed their poster as a ritual; either they pick up a poster at random and give it to its owner, or they simply turn over the poster in front of them (which will be their own poster)
- It's important that everyone has finished writing before the posters are given back to the owners

Variations

Magic envelopes: similar to the appreciation poster, but participants write/draw a note for each person and then put them in envelopes which are hanging on a "clothes line".

Snowballing: each person crumples their own poster and throws it into the centre, then picks up someone else's.

Safety/welfare

People can feel emotional when reading positive things about themselves, so keep this in mind when leading this activity.



Creating Our Own Personalised Altar

Bringing sacred objects to a shared space

Goals: To help participants to reflect on their faith, and to provide an opportunity for them to share it with others

Suitability: 8+

Duration: 20 minutes (depending on size of group)

Resources

A low table with a cloth draped over it; a circle of chairs or cushions; and objects of faith and belief

Preparation

Ask participants to bring an object that in some way symbolises their faith or search for meaning in life. It could be a treasured object of theirs, or a natural object found outdoors

Structure

- The leader invites participants to come up to the table with their object, one by one, and simply place it on the table. If they wish, they can say a few words about the significance of the object
- There should be a respectful silence between each sharing
- Some words may be said at the end on the theme of faith or belief

Variations

This kind of ritual can be practised in relation to any theme, such as "What I value most in my life" or "What I value most about this community". Participants need to be given some time to find their object; if it is a workshop or residential weekend, they could be invited to bring their object with them

Safety/welfare

None



"Today is Special Because..."

An opening or closing ritual to express appreciation of one aspect of the day

Goals: Create a positive atmosphere of appreciation

Suitability: All ages; **Duration:** 10 minutes
smaller children may
need prompting

Resources None

Preparation Set up chairs in a circle

Structure

- Ask everyone to take turns to stand and complete the sentence "Today is special because..."
- After each person has spoken, the rest of the group can give them a round of applause
- The applause can be silent: waving hands, instead of clapping. You can explain that it is one way in which hearing-impaired people choose to applaud

Variations The speaker can do a movement to illustrate what they are saying; the movement is then copied by the rest of the group.

Safety/welfare None



Water Communion

Everyone brings water from their holidays and shares it in a communal bowl

Goals: To make everyone aware of other places and their unity

Suitability: All ages; **Duration:** 15 minutes

younger ones may
need supervision

Resources

Large decorative bowl

Preparation

Before the summer, ask everyone to bring a small amount of water back from their travels, or from home if they are not planning to be away. Place the bowl on a decorated table or altar. Ask people to keep their water with them until the ritual begins

Structure

- Invite each person to come forward and pour their water into the communal bowl
- When this is done, either pass the bowl around or ask people to come forward to "bless" themselves by touching a dipped finger from the communal bowl on their forehead, neck, or throat
- Alternatively, you can organise a "chain blessing", in which one person dips their finger and blesses the next person, who then dips their finger to bless the person after them

Variations

Each person can say something about the origin of their water offering if they wish. At the end of the ceremony, each person can take some of the communal water away with them in their container. They will have some droplets of everyone's water – which could be a reminder of our interdependence and connection

Safety/welfare

Be aware of the people who didn't manage to bring some water to share, for whatever reason. You may like to have some spare jars of water for them on one side so that they can participate. If they want to speak, they could say something about what water means to them in their life



Walking Meditation

Follow a path made from tape or string on the floor

Goals: Encourage mindful movement and relaxation

Suitability: All ages **Duration:** 15 minutes

Resources

String or masking/coloured tape; music (optional)

Preparation

Lay out a path on the floor with enough space to prevent people bumping into each other. You could make it a spiral, a maze, or a random path. Use as much space as possible. It's worth checking out the "path" to see how long it takes you

Structure

- Ask people to line up at the beginning of the path. You may want to lead the group, so that you can set the pace
- Explain that the purpose of the activity is to walk mindfully, being aware of the body's movement, the path, and the other people around
- When they have completed the path, they can either stand at the end of the path or sit down
- You may choose to debrief in the circle to find out how everyone felt about the experience

Variations

Using a bell or gong every 2–3 minutes, ask people to pause and stand still when they hear the sound, and then move when the bell is rung again.

In good weather, take the activity outside. Lead the group on a path of your own choosing – no need for tape.

Safety/welfare

Be aware of any obstacles which might cause trip hazards; ensure that those with limited mobility feel included.



'One Thing' Checkout Suggestions

Each person is asked to share one thing (for example, one thing they are grateful for)

Goals: A way to share appreciation of the positive aspects of life

Suitability: All ages; **Duration:** 10 minutes
younger ones may
need encouragement

Resources None

Preparation Circle of chairs

Structure

- Sit in a circle and ask each person to say "one thing" (see suggestions below)
- You can either go around the circle one by one or invite people to speak in whichever order they want (this is sometimes called "popcorn")
- Suggestions: one thing you are looking forward to/grateful for/achieved this week/liked about today, etc.

Variations You can ask people to "check out" by sharing their feelings in one word, three words, or a sentence.

Safety/welfare None

10. Resources and Useful Contacts

Here are some publications you may find useful:

Top Tip: Find your local SCRAPSTORE. These can be found all around the country and for a small annual fee, you can collect all sorts of materials (paper/cloth/interesting junk for creative activities). You need to sign up as a charity and pay a small amount for a trolley load of fantastic goods! This also helps to promote the principle of re-cycling as the materials are left over from large businesses.

Unitarian publications:

Awakenings: First Steps in Religious Awareness for Under-7s

Covers five topics: the senses, the feelings, the natural world, change and celebrations.

The Chalice Award Leader's Pack

A modular RE programme for the 4–14 age group, consisting of Green, Bronze, Silver, and Gold awards.

Cosmic Kids Book for 7–11 year olds

A book of games and puzzles – good to have for children who turn up sporadically at a church with no fixed programme.

Ignition: a Programme for Young Adults in Unitarian Churches

Nine sessions exploring how people can gain new insights into themselves and their beliefs.

Unidoodles – for 7 year olds and up

A lively set of A3 pages for doodling and fun exploring a range of Unitarian values. By Lyanne Mitchell and John Harley.

All the above are available from the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, Essex Hall, 1–6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY, or via www.unitarian.org.uk

Unitarian Universalist Resources:

Tapestry of Faith

Embodying a faith-development focus for our congregations, 'Tapestry of Faith' is a series of programmes and resources for all ages which nurture the Unitarian Universalist identity, spiritual growth, a transforming faith, and vital communities of justice and love.

www.uua.org/re/tapestry

'We Believe' Learning and Living our Unitarian & Universalist Principles

The UUA book store: There are several inspiring titles on UUA website. For example: '31 ways to change the world: we are what we do'

www.uuabookstore.org

Other books and publications:

Out of the Ark Music

Great songs written for children – meaningful lyrics but not religious.

www.outoftheark.com

The Junior Assembly Book by Doreen Vause and Liz Beaumont. Published by Nelson Thornes. A spiral-bound, very practical resource.

The Shortest Distance: 101 Stories from the World's Spiritual Traditions by Bill Darlison
A treasury of wonderful stories available as "print on demand" from www.lulu.com

How the Children Became Stars: A Family Treasury of Stories, Prayers and Blessings from Around the World by Aaron Zerah
Ave Maria Press, available from second-hand retailers

Alleluya! 77 songs for thinking people A real mix of secular and spiritual songs including well known ones such as: Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head. Look out for other books in that series.

Festivals, Family and Food by Diana Carey and Judy Large. Good for craft ideas and stories.

One Hundred Wisdom Stories from Around the World by Margaret Silf.

Children Just like Me Festivals, carnivals and feast days from around the world. Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley.

I Can Make a Difference A treasury to inspire our children. Marian Wright Edelman

Values and Visions A handbook for spiritual development and global awareness. This is probably out of print but there are copies may be available from second-hand retailers.

Frog and Toad Stories by Arnold Lobel.

Human resources:

Rev John Harley: General Assembly Youth Coordinator. John is happy to advise on Religious Education work and ways to make worship more intergenerational and participatory. Contact: jharley@unitarian.org.uk.

Margaret Robinson: REvolution RE Course Administrator. The REvolution course consists of two weekends and four Saturdays spread throughout the year. This course trains pioneers in RE and child-friendly worship, and caters for trainees who want to work with children or young people. Contact margaretrobinson81@gmail.com for more information and dates.

Online Resources:

There are also many online teaching resources which could be adapted to a Unitarian setting. Once you get a feel for what works in your congregation, you will be able to search for suitable activities, readings, and games.

11. Acknowledgements

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