



On your marks

Here are some useful hints and guidelines for those who are asked to give a talk at an all-age service.

Get set

- Remember to welcome the children and young people present and plan to be inclusive in whatever activity, dialogue or presentation that you intend to use.
- Do not simply prepare something 'just for the children', as you will almost inevitably run the risk of talking down to them.
- Plan your presentation as a dialogue and so develop your theme through questions and answers. Use simple activities, which make the presentation interactive.

Go!

1 What to watch out for when handling 'dialogue'

- Don't use closed questions (i.e. those that can be answered by one word only).
- Don't have one 'right' answer in mind for which you painfully search, eliminating all the others on the way!
- Do accept, and wherever possible use, all answers. The learning and teaching process is two-way.
- Don't keep asking the same people, however eager they may be.

2 What to watch out for in any activities together

- Don't just use children up front.
- Don't ask young children to do something too difficult for them.
- Don't use children as human lecterns (i.e. someone to hold up a word or object).
- Don't just work at the front with a small group in a limited area, as often the rest of the congregation can easily become excluded.
- Do make it fun! It doesn't always have to have some immediate and deep spiritual connection.
- Do find ways of recognising the willingness and involvement of those who take part.
- Do not make clever asides just for the adults. Talk with the children, not about them.

3 What to watch out for when you come to the main part of what you want to say

- Keep it active, visual and short. Don't be complex or 'clever'.
- Keep your examples and illustrations clear, concrete and uncluttered. Any pictures need to be larger than you think and fonts need to be similarly very large and bold. Check that things can be seen from the back of the church. An alternative is to have multiple copies that can be passed around.



- Practise your presentation beforehand. Why not tape it and play it back as you travel to the venue. It will mean that you fix the outline in your head and you won't need to keep referring to notes, which in this context is to be avoided if at all possible.
- Have one clear message you want to share.
- Use stories but tell them with energy, using movement, facial expressions, eye-contact with the congregation, pauses and changes in volume!
- Use all the senses to convey the message. This will mean different entry points for different people in the congregation i.e. through music, actions, what they see or smell or even taste.
- Move around the congregation. Be part of the learning together!
- Be ready to hear some of the new insights that will come from the congregation and especially the children. Share your delight in learning something new!
- Beware cliché religious language. It won't just be the children who will switch off.
- Don't re-tell the Bible story after it has just been read. Either do it differently in the first place (e.g. use a different translation or have more than one voice) or alternatively make the reading part of your presentation anyway.
- Include as many thoughtful questions as helpful answers. Use phrases like 'I wonder...', which invite the children and adults to use their imaginations and engage personally with the issues.

4 And finally

- Keep it crisp. In particular be confident about these three points:
 - What is my opening line?
 - What is my closing thought/question?
 - What is my key message?