



On your marks

Most congregations have at least one Sunday a month when all the church family - adults and children - worship together for the whole time. These services should be special and a real witness the new togetherness Christians find in Jesus. Sadly though, they often fall short of this ideal and become simply 'children's services', where adults (and often even the children) feel patronised or 'adult services' with children merely present. How can our worship be truly for all the ages there? Each part of the worship needs to be accessible and intelligible to everyone. The following is a way of doing this for the confession.

Get set:

No special equipment is needed.

Go!

1. Introduce a time of saying sorry. In most traditions this is often near the opening of the service, following an introduction and a hymn of worship. Use words such as:

We know that God is love and that God loves all that he has made. He loves you and me. Jesus showed us by his life and tells us in his own words that God will never turn anyone away who comes to him. However our lives are far from perfect. We know that we are not the best we can be nor the best God longs us to be. Sin has spoilt our lives and God's world. Sin is a deliberate choice to do what saddens God and we are guilty of this. God accepts us as we are but loves us too much to leave us as we are. This is why he asks us to come to Jesus his Son and say sorry.

2. For the style of confession that follows, the congregation need to keep their eyes open and imitate each of the hand shapes and movements that you show them. It is a way of bringing all that is sin - all that we have done wrong - to God for his forgiveness.
 - *Make a fist*We are sorry for the times we have got angry with other people.
 - *Point away from yourself with your index finger*We are sorry for the times we have blamed others and seen things wrong in others without recognising how much is also wrong in us.
 - *Close up your hand and hold it close to your chest*We are sorry for the times we have kept things selfishly to ourselves and not been prepared to give to those who need our help.
 - *Put your hand over your mouth*We are sorry for the foolish words we have spoken which have hurt other people.
 - *Put your hand over your eyes*We are sorry that we have deliberately chosen not to see the good things we could have done to help other people.
 - *Put your hand over one ear*We are sorry for the times we have not listened to the cries of those who are poor or who suffer injustice.
3. After a pause ask everyone to hold out that same hand with an open palm upward, as if they



are waiting to receive something. Use words such as:

Jesus says, 'If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest'. So we bring all that we are to Jesus - all our sins and our failure to love. Thank-you that you died for us so that we might be forgiven and start a new life in the power of your Holy Spirit.

4. As a way of remembering that it is through the cross that our sins are forgiven, now ask everyone to trace the shape of a cross with the index finger of their other hand across the palm of the hand they are holding out.
5. You could add a further dimension to this last part by asking everyone to turn to their neighbour and to trace the shape of the cross on to the palm of their neighbour's hand with the words "your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake".
6. Celebrate his forgiveness with a song of praise that talks of how God gave us Jesus and the cross.