

# Spiritual styles

Exploring the variety of ways in which people experience God and make sense of the world around them

## ROOTS and spiritual styles

ROOTS encourages leaders of worship and learning to become familiar with the different ways people connect with God, in order to prepare services and sessions which offer opportunities for everyone to be engaged. You can read all the articles and supporting documents about spiritual styles on the website, in the Support section under *Adult*, *All-age* and *CYP*. You will find:

- Six articles by researcher and practitioner Dave Csinos, who defined four spiritual styles: Word, Emotion, Symbol and Action.
- Six further articles give guidance on how to plan for different congregations and groups using an understanding of spiritual styles as a tool to help meet people's different needs and preferences.

If you're unfamiliar with these ideas, we suggest you start there before reading the article below.

In this issue we start a new series, considering our journey through the church year and how we can offer diverse provision within the flavour and feeling of each season.

## Spiritual styles during Advent and at Christmas

As we approach the season of Advent and Christmas, we celebrate the wide variety of opportunities that the Churches offer very successfully to mark the birth of Jesus. This is perhaps the time when the Church engages best with the wider community and an openness to its traditions offers the chance to foster real spiritual engagement.

## Christmas activities in the community

### Carol singing **W E**

Community carol singing in shopping centres, community centres, pubs and other significant gathering places provides an opportunity to hear and sing familiar words, to evoke and create memories, and to engage with the Christmas message.

### Charity campaigns **E A**

At this time of year charities, both national and local, run major campaigns. Churches can respond to the Christmas story by encouraging people to think about alternative Christmas presents, collecting gifts for shoe boxes or hampers for vulnerable local people, writing Christmas cards for the housebound and collecting for national appeals.

### Christmas tree festival **E S**

A church or hall filled with Christmas trees decorated in different themes and styles brings community groups and/or individuals together, to tell the story of the incarnation and reflect its message and relevance today.

### Christingle services **W E A S**

These are often significant community events, drawing in schools, a variety of youth and children's groups and other community organisations. All styles can be engaged: through the creation of the Christingles and exploring what they represent (Symbol); hearing the readings (Word); gathering as a community (Emotion); raising funds for the Children's Society (Action).

## The Advent journey

### A symbol-rich Advent **S**

The creation and lighting of the Advent wreath or the building of a Jesse Tree, with its visual references to Old Testament characters, will be rewarding. Advent carol services, which exploit the lighting of candles in the dark winter season, perhaps with processions and a wide variety of readings, are also suitable.

### The emotion style in Advent **E**

The Posada, or travelling nativity, where the crib figures of Mary and Joseph are welcomed into different homes for the night, carried to their new shelter by the previous night's hosts, provides a welcome opportunity to arrange and share hospitality.

### An action Advent **A**

Many churches encourage people not to send cards to others within the congregation, but to give the money saved to charity. Someone with an action preference might facilitate this, finding an imaginative and up-to-the-minute way to share greetings within the congregation. Some churches encourage the sending of charity cards or indeed, create and market their own cards. Christmas is a great time to provide hospitality to the vulnerable in the community or spend time with the housebound, and Advent is the time to plan this.

### A word journey through Advent **W**

It is easy, in this season of parties and plays, for the Word to get lost or overlooked. There are wonderful collections of poetry and prose focused around the Christmas story, and a huge collection of children's literature draws not only on the biblical nativity account, but also on the whole message of the incarnation. An Advent focus on reading and reflection, using this wealth of resources, will be a rich offering.

KEY: Word = **W**; Emotion = **E**; Action = **A**; Symbol = **S**.

## Advent calendars **W E S**

Finally it is worth thinking about Advent calendars. In addition to their appealing chocolate, a little research through the variety of Advent calendars on offer ought to produce ideas for each spiritual style. Our *ROOTS Advent calendar* (see p.5) is very simple this year, suggesting things to look out for in the everyday world that have been inspired by the ideas in the readings of the Sundays in Advent. The tasks offered in the calendar focus on symbol and metaphor (Symbol); each task relates to words in the week's reading (Word) and the creative nature of the tasks, involving searching the everyday world, will encourage a collaborative approach among households (Emotion).

## Christmas worship

Throughout the Christmas period a wide range of services provides for a variety of spiritual styles.

### The carol service **W E A S**

One very traditional Christmas service has attracted renewed interest in the last few years, and we consider it now as an example of a single act of worship that caters for a broad range of spiritual styles. This is the carol service, typically of nine lessons interspersed with congregational, and often choir-only, carols. The service was devised following the First World War by Eric Milner-White, then Chaplain of King's College, Cambridge. As an army padre during the War, he had become convinced that the Church of England needed more imaginative worship. Fresh Expressions of Church and alternative worship communities across the country have taken the traditional lessons and carols structure and reshaped the idea for today.

A quick analysis demonstrates that a carol service of readings and carols engages with each of the spiritual styles, and provides an act of worship that offers something for everyone.

**Word** A wide range of key Bible passages are read well and form a cohesive narrative; there are hymns and carols with words that express the timeless message of the incarnation, and structured prayers that reflect the meaning of the story in today's world.

**Emotion** The sense of being drawn together in a substantial group, sharing in familiar words and carols, is supportive, and if the service is followed by mince pies and other Christmas goodies, all the more appealing!

**Symbol** The service includes movement through the building, the lighting of candles, quiet reflection on images and the use of objects and icons to enhance the readings and carols.

**Action** There is a direct link between the birth of Christ and what this means for humankind and creation today. Many of the re-workings of nine lessons and carols include a challenge to go from the service to act on what has been heard, said and sung.

### Nativity services **W E S**

In recent years the 'nativity service', in schools and pre-schools, churches and children's groups, has been given a 'bad press' as a show put on by children, something to be photographed and filmed by parents and endured by everyone else. Extra characters have crept into the narrative and the story of the nativity has been muddled and distorted. Does the traditional carol service have anything to teach the nativity service as we have come to know it?



*Las Posadas 2000, by Carmen Lomas Garza.*

Can the congregation be drawn in somehow, demonstrating to children that participation is not something to grow out of? This might be done by integrating a familiar carol with the narrative, allowing the congregation to participate using familiar words (Emotion). Could they be invited to stand or move at certain points so that they respond physically to the events portrayed? Are symbols included to reflect on: perhaps a candle might be lit at the start, or nativity scenes or images from around the world shown? Is there a call to action and a direct link made between the nativity story and today's reality? Can images and messages from the nativity be recreated in poems, prose and Bible passages, read alongside the nativity play, engaging those with a word preference?

### The crib service **W E S**

This is generally Christmas Eve worship for families that has grown in popularity in recent years. Its attraction is perhaps that it is short and focused, offered at a time of day when everyone is ready for a change, a bare hour of calm at a frantic time, familiar words and familiar tunes when adults have not much left to give, and children need some down time. Telling the story speaks to a word style; the familiar characters appeal to an emotion style and the focus on the crib and its figures support a symbol style.

## Making it happen

To do all the things mentioned so far would be too much for the vast majority of churches at Christmas time. However, the possibility of co-operating ecumenically: partnering with other churches in the local area, each church and tradition contributing from its own strengths to provide a broad, cohesive programme, could make for an exciting and challenging Christmas provision. In many places churches have worked together so that only one or two provide a midnight Christmas Eve service or a Christingle service or a Christmas Messy Church. This could be effectively extended by looking at the spiritual styles ensuring all are provided for across the churches of a local area, and that everyone has a chance to engage with the Christmas message, in a way that is meaningful to them.

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