



NOTES

TIME FOR CHRISTMAS

'There's no time like the present and no present like your time.'

The Uniting Church's 2009 postcard promotion reminds us of two important aspects of Christmas: time and gifts. In today's world these can be contentious issues. We experience pressures about how we use our time and how we select (and pay for) gifts.

The love can get lost.

In this worship service we encourage people to take some time out from the busy-ness and competitiveness that can be so great at this time of the year and focus on Jesus, God's love in human flesh.

Jesus, the greatest present of all time.

There's no time like Christmas!

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USING THIS RESOURCE

These notes have been prepared by the Resource Centre for Children's and Family Ministry of the Uniting Church (SA) to help congregations plan Christmas worship involving children and families. You may make as many copies of the notes as needed for your worship planners and leaders.

Use of music and other copyright elements is not covered in this permission.

Read through all the material. Discuss it as a planning team. You may use the entire sample service, or any of the ideas that are appropriate in your situation.

If you use the resource, we would appreciate your letting us know what you do. Send a brief email to rccfm@bigpond.com

You can find more all-age worship resources on our web site <http://mrn.sa.uca.org.au>, click on helps; children's ministry; all-age worship.

ALL-AGE WORSHIP

People of all ages will worship at your church at Christmas time. You want to plan a worship service that does not exclude any age group.

All-age (intergenerational) worship is, first and foremost, worship — an encounter between God and God's people; a dialogue in which God speaks and people respond, both in the worship service and in their lives.

Intentionally *intergenerational* worship

- allows this dialogue to take place through several of the senses, movement and activity
- focuses on a single theme and connects that theme with the lives of the worshipers. It reinforces the theme by exploring it in several different ways
- provides worshipers (young, old and in-between) with an experience and thoughts they can remember and talk about in their homes. It may provide resources to support that conversation
- encourages interaction and dialogue among people of the various generations represented in the worshipping community
- differs from worship that is planned by adults for adults, and differs from worship for children alone — planned either by adults or by children
- takes seriously the understanding that people of all ages worship together in the body of Christ. People of all ages can also

plan worship, invite people to worship, and lead worship

All-age worship recognises and values the children present in worship and the child within each adult.

UPSIZING & DOWNSIZING

This service can be used in large or small congregations. It can also be used in a home setting.

Each planning group will need to adapt the ideas to suit their own particular situation: the people and the facilities.

WORSHIPERS

For some people who worship with you this may be the first time they hear, or the first time they really engage with, the great mystery of God coming to us as a baby at Christmas time. For many it will be a reminder of what they already know and of experiences they have had in previous Christmases. For some worshipers this may be the last time they hear the story.

At Christmas time people who seldom take part in Christian worship are likely to join with your congregation. Some may come as guests of family or friends. Others may come in response to your advertising.

- Why do they come to church at Christmas time?
- What are they looking for?
- What does God have to offer them — through you?
- How can you plan for all the worshipers?

Consider these questions — and your answers — before you begin planning a special worship service for Christmas time.

PLANNING

All-age worship is best planned by an intergenerational team, working with the pastor/minister/priest or lay ministry team. If possible the team should consist of at least three people: one representing the youngest, one the middle and one the oldest third of the congregation.

The team may also draw on people who have special abilities, eg in the areas of hospitality, music, drama, visual arts and technology.

Planning as an intergenerational team can be a valuable experience for all involved.

Suggested planning steps:

1. begin with prayer, and trust God's Spirit to guide your planning

2. consider the 'Worshippers' questions above
3. look through these notes to see how they can help in planning the kind of service you want to hold
4. use these notes and other resources to develop a worship outline
5. flesh out the outline, consider your own people and facilities
6. work with worship leaders to work out details: who does what, when and how.

environment. This is the responsibility of all members of the congregation, first of all, the people who invite and bring people to worship. You may designate specific people to take on specific duties.

Your **HOSPITALITY TEAM** may include people of all ages, possibly family groups. Their responsibility will be planning for and ensuring the comfort of guests. This may involve:

- being aware of the safety features of the worship space, eg location of alternate exits, location of first aid equipment, identity of people with first aid training
- greeting people as they arrive (at the entrance to the property to direct them to parking spaces, outside the building to direct them to the entrance, and/or at the door)
- helping people to get settled (possibly showing them to seats, introducing them to someone sitting near them, telling them where to find toilets and other facilities, giving them a worship leaflet)
- paying special attention to the very young, the very old and people with handicaps. Seat them where they will be able to see/hear, but not feel conspicuous. You may provide a quiet activity bag or play item for very young children
- keeping alert to needs of people during the service, and assisting as required
- providing fellowship food or activity after the service (with something special for children who may not want to stand around while adults have a cuppa).

INVITATION AND ADVERTISING

The first people to notify about your service are the members of your congregation. Begin early to let them in on the excitement of what is being planned.

Encourage them to catch the vision of presenting the Good News to your community at Christmas time.

Use the Christmas Time cards and posters prepared by the Communications Unit of the Uniting Church as the basis of your promotion.

Members of your congregation (including children) can personalise the cards and give them to family and friends. Also consider

- a notice/invitation in your local newspaper
- printed invitation notices in a shopping centre or other gathering places
- a sign board outside your church.

Be sure to include the date, time and location of the service in all your promotional material.

HOSPITALITY

When you invite people to a worship service it is especially important to provide them with a warm welcome and a comfortable

POSTCARD — CHRISTMAS 2009



Each year, the Uniting Church SA coordinates a postcard campaign, which helps churches reach their communities with a Christmas message, at a low cost.

This year, the postcard's message will complement the theme of the strategic plan's profile raising campaign.

Shannon Short, Communications and Public Relations Manager of the Uniting Church in South Australia explains: 'This year we're focusing on time. We can buy extravagant presents, and throw great parties, but at the end of the day the best gift we can give is quality time with our family and friends.'

'During December - February, we will launch a campaign which focuses on the issue of loneliness in our community. We'll be encouraging everyone to think of people in their lives who may be lonely and do something about it, maybe by inviting them to a Christmas meal or making time to get to know them better.'

'We'll be seeking media coverage on this issue and running radio advertisements. Congregations can reinforce this message by distributing the postcards in their local community.'

To order postcards go to: www.sa.uca.org.au/goto/christmas09

Cost: \$65/1000 cards (\$50/1000 for orders of 5000 or more)

Orders by Monday, November 2, 2009.

Enquiries: Sarah Urmston
(08) 8236 4260

surmston@sa.uca.org.au

If it is your intention to make follow-up contact with any guests, the hospitality team may be responsible for obtaining guests' names, contact details, special needs, requests or other information.

WORSHIP SPACE & VISUALS

A clean, tidy and attractive worship area can help guests and regular worshipers feel that this is an interesting and inviting place to be.

If you have Christmas decorations that you use each year, display them. Make sure they are clean and in good repair.

If you want to add something new, Spotlight (and possibly other fabric retailers) has quite a nice printed traditional nativity scene that can be used as a banner.

For this service you may consider decorating your worship area with

- the Christmas time/present postcard and poster design
- motifs representing 'time': clocks and calendars (perhaps the UCA-SA calendar).
- the hand motif relating to the five love languages (see page 13).

If you are using the 'Love Languages at Christmas' skit, you might have the family room set up at the front of the church throughout the entire service.

Visual arts can enhance various aspects of the service by illustrating what is presented and discussed. So involve people with artistic talent and your technology team (if you project images electronically) in creating memorable visual impact that will enhance your presentation of the Good News.

MUSIC

Worshipers may hope to hear (and sing) old, familiar carols at Christmas time. So be sure to include opportunities for some carol singing. Some worshipers may come from another culture/country. Consult with new Australians in your congregation to see if there is music from their tradition that can be incorporated into the service.

Most of the worship music will be congregational singing lead by your organist or band or a special group brought together for the Christmas worship. Invite people to sing along or to just listen, as they choose.

Display words of the songs in your usual way: in a booklet or projected on screen.

Consider ways of involving children who are too young to read or sing the words, eg

- show visuals along with words if you use PowerPoint, or include some illustrations in worship bulletins
- teach actions for some key words in the song and ask everyone to do the actions as they sing, or use some Auslan signs, which you can find at the Auslan sign bank: www.auslan.org.au
- teach one or two lines that are repeated so everyone can sing these lines
- give children a percussion instrument to play or a flag to wave during a song.

SONG SUGGESTIONS

Here are some carols that reflect the specific themes of this service.

Most of these songs can be found in a variety of resources including the internet. The numbering is from *100 Favourite Christmas Carols* (Openbook Publishers), available from Australian Church Resources, www.acresources.com.au phone: 8177 2113

- #2 A song was heard at Christmas (Dutton-Smith)
 - #5 Angels from the realms of glory (Montgomery)
 - #9 Away in a manger (anonymous)
 - #10 At Christmas time, the birds all sing (Newton)
 - #13 Bethlehem lay a-sleeping (Wood)
 - #14 Mary's Child (Ainger)
 - #18 Come hither, you children (von Schmied)
 - #19 Come, join me, believers, triumphantly sing (Latin hymn)
 - #25 From Heaven above to earth I come (Luther)
 - #30 Go, tell it on the mountain (traditional)
 - #37 I know God loves me (Rische)
 - #39 In a little stable (Gockel)
 - #40 Infant holy, infant lowly (Polish carol)
 - #44 Joy to the world (Watts)
 - #47 Little Children can you tell (unknown)
 - #52 Long time ago in Bethlehem (Hairston)
 - #53 Love came down at Christmas (Rosetti)
 - #54 May the feet of God (Christmas blessing) (Podlich/Mann)
 - #60 O come, all ye faithful (Latin hymn)
 - #66 O thou holiest (Falk)
 - #70 Once in Royal David's City
- From the 'All Together' series:

#441 Jesus was sent to bring health to the ailing (Ylvisaker)

#482 See the love in the hands (Simpson)

#300 Practice Love (Newton)

WORSHIP LEADERS

People of different ages can be part of the teams that lead worship. For example, in the sample worship plan, worship leaders include:

- **HOSPITALITY TEAM**
- **MUSIC TEAM** including song leader, singers, instrumentalists. The **MUSICIANS** lead the congregation in singing and may present one or more 'performance' items or musical background for quiet parts of the worship.
- **TECH TEAM** who are responsible for amplification and electronic visuals.
- **WORSHIP LEADER** — This may be the minister/priest/pastor or a lay person. Two people can share the role. In a secular setting this person might be considered the compere. The worship leader is responsible for connecting with the worshipers and leading them through the worship.
- **BIBLE READER** — This person (or a group of people) reads the text that comes directly from the Bible. Although they may actually work from a printed script, it is a good idea for the reader to hold a large, open Bible or stand at a lectern with a large open Bible, to distinguish what they read from other spoken or read material.

Depending on options chosen, other people may also help with leading the service.

- **SIX ACTORS** — a family and a private investigator for the skit
- **PRAYER LEADER** — An individual or a group of people prepares and leads.

SERMON

In an all-age worship service the sermon should be an all-age sermon. This means it's short and simple.

In the model service there is an interactive sermon using a 'hands' theme to talk about God's love and Christmas.

If the sermon is for 'adults only', provide a theme-related activity for children to do during the sermon, either sitting with their families in the worship area or in a special children's area.

If children do a separate activity, allow a time for them to share what they have done with the older worshipers.

SOMETHING TO TAKE HOME

Extend the impact of the worship service by giving worshipers something tangible to take home as a reminder of the experience.

This resource provides a master for a 'Christmas Time in Our Home' calendar that you can copy and give as a present to each family/household. See pages 17,18.

The calendar provides suggestions for 'seizing the moment' to make and carry out a plan for investing time during a fortnight of Christmas time.

REHEARSAL

God, whom you worship at Christmas time, your Christmas visitors and the regular congregation deserve a Christmas worship experience that is the best you can make it.

This requires time for planning and for rehearsal. A complete walk-through will pinpoint any logistical problems, allow the worship leader/s to fine-tune instructions for the worshipers and ensure that the service itself runs smoothly.

Use rehearsal time as an opportunity to pray together and to remind participants of the awesome privilege and task they have in leading worship.

Discuss these two statements with the team who are leading worship:

- Worship leaders are the lead worshipers.
- You have to walk the same road as the people you lead.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT TIME

'Time' is one of those deceptively simple little words that we all use and understand.

But what, exactly, is time? Once you get started you can spend/invest/use/waste a lot of time thinking about time.

Is time a commodity, like money, that you can spend or invest or use or waste?

Is time a finite chunk of eternity that we can comprehend with our finite minds?

Is time a dimension like space that we can measure, divide and subdivide?

'Time' is one of the longest entries in *The Macquarie Dictionary*, taking up nearly a whole page.

Whatever it is, the Bible tells us that

- time is a gift from God
- we each have a portion of time for our earthly lives
- we have choices about how we use the time we are given; those choices have consequences and we are accountable for those choices
- we experience time day-by-day, moment-by-moment. God gives us the ability to recall the past and imagine the future, but we can live only the present.

There truly is no time like the present!

We speak of 'times', as portions of history:

- prehistoric times
- Bible times
- modern times
- good times, bad times.

We refer to cyclic or repeated times:

- Christmas time
- harvest time
- winter time
- finals time
- morning time
- meal time
- bed time.

We use 'time' mathematically as a function and to designate repetitions:

- five times five is twenty five
- the first time baby walked
- the last time I saw you.

We use a wide range of other terms related to our understanding of time.

- before, after, at the same time
- now, then, when.

Our language itself uses verb tenses to automatically alert us to the time and duration of actions, eg he ate, he had eaten, he has eaten, he is eating, he eats, he will eat, he will be eating, he will have eaten.

We measure time in seconds (and portions of seconds), minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, millennia, eons and light-years. The measurement of time is so important to us that we create more and more sophisticated machinery to measure it. We wear time-

measurement instruments on our wrists, carry them in our pockets, incorporate them into other equipment and surround ourselves with them in our homes and work places.

These devices are meant to assist us in using, planning, discussing and recording, as well as measuring, time.

CHRISTMAS TIME

The ultimate meaning of Christmas is that God chose to leave his perfect infinite realm to become a finite human being and to live in our finite world, bound by limits of space and time.

God spent time with us in our time because of his infinite love for us and his desire that we spend eternity with him.

Try getting your head around that as a concept!

The wonder is that we don't have to understand it.

The whole of God's love came to us as a baby — a baby that people could see and hear and cuddle. That baby became a man that people could talk with and walk with and eat with — a man they could love or crucify; a man in whose hands they could later see and touch nail holes.

Christmas is the point when Jesus came into our time. Christmas is the time when we celebrate Jesus' coming.

The birth of Jesus (thought to have occurred between 7 and 2 BC), is the basis for the Anno

⌚

Charles Dickens' classic story 'A Christmas Carol' is a time-travel story featuring the ghosts of Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas-yet-to-come.

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Clement Moore's poem 'A visit from St Nicholas' is placed firmly in time: 'the night before Christmas'.

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Even the Bible account of Jesus' birth is set in its historical time frame: 'In those days . . . in the reign of Emperor Augustus'.

Domini, *The Year of Our Lord*, system of numbering years.

December 25 is most likely not Jesus' actual date of birth. The date may have been chosen to correspond with the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere, the time when the seasons change and daylight hours begin to increase.

The Church traditionally considers the annual celebration of Jesus' birth as the starting point for the liturgical year.

- The year begins with Advent, a four-Sunday season preceding December 25
- Christmas Day is the start of the twelve-day Christmas season, which ends on
- Epiphany (6 January) marking the visit of the Magi.

Our commercial culture has put a different construction on Christmas time with sales of 'Christmas' paraphernalia beginning as early as the market can bear. White plastic Christmas trees were on sale in our local shopping mall in mid-September! Following a token closing on Christmas day, shops re-open for a period of after-Christmas sales.

Our schools have an extended holiday beginning before Christmas and stretching into the next year. Construction sites and many businesses close for a week or two at Christmas time.

Some aspects of Christmas time are thrust upon us from the outside. But we can make some decisions about what Christmas time is for ourselves and our families — now.

SOME BIBLE VERSES ABOUT TIME

Genesis 1:14 (CEV)

God said, 'I command lights to appear in the sky and to separate day from night and to show the time for seasons, special days, and years, . . .

Genesis 8:22 (NIRV)

As long as the earth lasts, there will always be a time to plant and a time to gather the crops. As long as the earth lasts, there will always be cold and heat. There will always be summer and winter, day and night.'

Genesis 9:12 (NIRV)

God continued, 'My covenant is between me and you and every living thing with you. It is a covenant for all **time** to come.

Exodus 12:24 (NIRV)

Obey all of these directions. It's a law for you and your children after you for all **time** to come.

Leviticus 23:2 (CEV)

Say to the community of Israel: I have chosen certain **times** for you to come together and worship me.

Leviticus 23:21 (CEV)

This is a day of celebration and worship, a **time** of rest from your work. You and your descendants must obey this law.

Job 14:5 (CEV)

Our **time** on earth is brief; the number of our days is already decided by you.

Psalms 31:15 (NIV)

My **times** are in your hands;

Psalms 33:11 (NIRV)

But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever. What he wants to do will last for all **time**.

Psalms 50:15 (CEV)

Pray to me in **time** of trouble. I will rescue you, and you will honor me.

Psalms 72:5 (NIRV)

He will rule as long as the sun shines and the moon gives its light. He will rule for all **time** to come.

Psalms 77:12 (NIRV)

I will spend **time** thinking about everything you have done. I will consider all of your mighty acts.

Psalms 79:13 (NIRV)

For all **time** to come we will keep on praising you.

Psalms 90:12 (CEV)

Teach us to use wisely all the **time** we have.

Psalms 93:2 (NIRV)

Lord, you began to rule a long **time** ago. You have always existed.

Psalms 100:5 (NIRV)

The Lord is good. His faithful love continues forever. It will last for all **time** to come.

Psalms 119:27 (NIRV)

Help me understand what your rules can teach me. Then I'll spend **time** thinking about the miracles you have done.

Psalms 145:15 (CEV)

Everyone depends on you, and when the **time** is right, you provide them with food.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There's a time for everything that is done on earth. There is a time to be born. And there's a time to die. There is a time to plant. And there's a time to pull up what is planted. There is a time to kill. And there's a time to heal. There is a time to tear down. And there's a time to build up. There is a time to cry. And there's a time to laugh. There is a time to be sad. And there's a time to dance. There is a time to scatter stones. And there's a time to gather them. There is a time to hug. And there's a time not to hug. There is a time to search. And there's a time to stop searching. There is a time to keep. And there's a time to throw away. There is a time to tear. And there's a time to mend. There is a time to be silent. And there's a time to speak. There is a time to love. And there's a time to hate. There is a time for war. And there's a time for peace.

Matthew 6:24 (NIRV)

'No one can serve two masters at the same **time**. He will hate one of them and love the other. Or he will be faithful to one and dislike the other. You can't serve God and Money at the same **time**.

Matthew 25:13 (CEV)

So, my disciples, always be ready! You don't know the day or the **time** when all this will happen.

Mark 1:15 (CEV)

He said, 'The **time** has come! God's kingdom will soon be here. Turn back to God and believe the good news!'

Mark 13:26 (NIRV)

'At that **time** people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds. He will come with great power and glory.

Luke 12:29 (NIRV)

'Don't spend **time** thinking about what you will eat or drink. Don't worry about it.

John 7:33 (NIRV)

Jesus said, 'I am with you for only a short **time**. Then I will go to the One who sent me.'

Acts 1:7 (CEV)

Jesus said to them, 'You don't need to know the **time** of those events that only the Father controls.'

Acts 2:42 (CEV)

They spent their **time** learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together.

Romans 5:6 (CEV)

Christ died for us at a **time** when we were helpless and sinful.

Romans 6:10 (NIRV)

When he died, he died once and for all **time** as far as sin is concerned. Now that he lives, he lives as far as God is concerned.

Romans 8:19 (NIRV)

Everything God created looks forward to the **time** when his children will appear in their full and final glory.

Romans 12:12 (CEV)

Let your hope make you glad. Be patient in **time** of trouble and never stop praying.

1 Corinthians 2:7 (NIRV)

No, we speak about God's secret wisdom. His wisdom has been hidden. But before **time** began, God planned that his wisdom would bring us heavenly glory.

1 Corinthians 14:15 (CEV)

Then what should I do? There are **times** when I should pray with my spirit, and **times** when I should pray with my mind. Sometimes I should sing with my spirit, and at other **times** I should sing with my mind.

2 Corinthians 4:9 (CEV)

In **times** of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again.

Ephesians 1:10 (CEV)

Then when the **time** is right, God will do all that he has planned, and Christ will bring together everything in heaven and on earth.

Ephesians 3:21 (NIRV)

Give him glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Give him glory through all **time** and for ever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 6:18 (NIRV)

At all **times**, pray by the power of the Spirit. Pray all kinds of prayers. Be watchful, so that you can pray. Always keep on praying for all of God's people.

Colossians 4:5 (CEV)

When you are with unbelievers, always make good use of the **time**.

2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NIRV)

May the Lord who gives peace give you peace at all **times** and in every way. May the Lord be with all of you.

Titus 1:2 (NIRV)

Faith and understanding rest on the hope of eternal life. Before **time** began, God promised to give that life. And he does not lie.

Hebrews 7:25 (NIRV)

People now come to God through him. And he is able to save them completely and for all **time**. Jesus lives forever. He prays for them.

Jude 1:25 (NIRV)

Give praise to the only God. He is our Saviour. Glory, majesty, power and authority belong to him. Give praise to him through Jesus Christ our Lord. Give praise to the One who was before all **time**, who now is, and who will be forever. Amen.

THE STORY OF JESUS' BIRTH

Note the significant number of time references there are in these accounts.

HEBREWS 1:1-2 (CEV)

Long ago in many ways and at many times God's prophets spoke his message to our ancestors. But **now at last**, God sent his Son to bring his message to us. God created the universe by his Son, and everything will someday belong to the Son.

GALATIANS 4:4 (CEV)

But **when the time was right**, God sent his Son, and a woman gave birth to him. His Son obeyed the Law.

LUKE 2:1-21 (CEV)

About that time Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. These first records were made **when Quirinius was governor** of Syria.

Everyone had to go to their own hometown to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. **Long ago** Bethlehem had been King David's hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family. Mary was engaged to Joseph and travelled with him to Bethlehem. She was **soon** going to have a baby.

While they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn.

That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. **All at once** an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, 'Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. **This very day** in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.'

Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: 'Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God.'

After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.' They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

Eight days later Jesus' parents did for him what the Law of Moses commands. And they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told Mary **when he promised** she would have a baby.

MATTHEW 2:1-15a (CEV)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. This happened **while Herod was king** of Judea.

After Jesus' birth, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, 'Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews? **When we were in the east**, we saw his star. **Now** we have come to worship him.'

When King Herod heard about it, he was very upset. Everyone in Jerusalem was troubled too. So Herod called together all the chief priests of the people. He also called the teachers of the law. He asked them where the Christ was going to be born.

'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied. 'This is what the prophet has written, "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are certainly not the least important among the towns of Judah. A ruler will come out of you. He will be the shepherd of my people Israel."'

Then Herod called for the Wise Men secretly. He found out from them **exactly when** the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem. He said, 'Go! Make a careful search for the child. **As soon as you find him**, bring me a report. **Then** I can go and worship him too.'

After the Wise Men had listened to the king, they went on their way. The star they had seen **when they were in the east** went ahead of them. It finally stopped over the place where the child was. **When they saw the star**, they were filled with joy.

The Wise Men went to the house. There they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. **Then** they opened their treasures. They gave him gold, incense and myrrh.

But God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they returned to their country on a different road.

When the Wise Men had left, Joseph had a dream. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to him. 'Get up!' the angel said. 'Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there **until I tell you** to come back. Herod is going to search for the child. He wants to kill him.' Joseph got up. **During the night**, he left for Egypt with the child and his mother Mary. They stayed there **until King Herod died**.

TELLING THE STORY WITH WORDS AND HANDS

WORDS	HANDS
About that time Emperor Augustus gave orders	Point one finger, giving order
for the names of all the people to be listed in record books . These first records were made when Quirinius was governor of Syria.	Mimic writing
Everyone had to go to their own hometown	'Walk' two fingers
to be listed	Mimic writing
So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea.	Walk two fingers
Long ago Bethlehem had been King David's hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family.	Hands on head as crown
Mary was engaged to Joseph	Point to engagement ring finger
and travelled with him to Bethlehem.	Walk two fingers
She was soon going to have a baby .	Hands on tummy
While they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn.	Hands together, as holding a baby
That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep.	Hand shading eyes to look around. (Yes, it's night and no sunshine, but bear with it.)
All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them.	Cup both hands around eyes to shade the brightness.
The shepherds were frightened .	Hands over face with fear.
But the angel said , 'Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy.'	Two arms up as angel making announcement.
This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord.	Hands on head as crown.
You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.'	Hands together, as holding a baby
Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said:	Hands up, flicking fingers to indicate lots of angels in the sky.
' Praise God in heaven!	Hands up in praise
Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God.'	Hand out in peace sign.
After the angels had left and gone back to heaven,	Hands up, flicking fingers, then still.
the shepherds said to each other, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.'	Hand to mouth and outward, indicating speech.
They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph,	Walk two fingers rapidly
and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.	Hands together, as holding a baby
They told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised.	Hand to mouth and outward, indicating speech.
But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.	Hand to heart.
As the shepherds returned to their sheep,	Walk two fingers.
they were praising God	Hands up in praise
and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.	Hand to mouth and outward, indicating speech.

LOVE LANGUAGES

Five love languages is a helpful theory proposed by Dr Gary Chapman in a series of books including:

- *The Five Love Languages*
- *The Five Love Languages of Children* (with Dr Ross Campbell)
- *The Heart of the Five Love Languages*

The languages are summarized below, but if you are incorporating the 'love languages' into your service, it would be good to read one of the books or at least check the web site: www.fivelovelanguages.com

According to Dr Chapman there are five different ways that people demonstrate (or speak) their love to others and understand another person's expression of love to them. He refers to them as 'love languages'. He suggests that it is important that we are aware of our own language preference and that we understand and speak the love languages of the people we love.

www.fivelovelanguages.com includes a simple test that will help you determine your preferred love language.

Very simply the languages are

- 1. Quality time:** spending time with a person, which may include quality conversation, shared activities and shared experiences
- 2. Words of affirmation:** telling a person that we love them; giving verbal compliments and encouragement
- 3. Physical touch:** touching a person in appropriate ways
- 4. Acts of service:** doing things for a person out of love, not duty
- 5. Gifts:** giving a person tangible presents and the gift of oneself.

With children, we use all of the love languages. Observing the child's reaction over time, helps us discover which is the most important to them. We then use that one a lot (even if it is not our own preferred love language).

GOD'S LOVE

God created us and knows exactly what we are like. God knows the love languages we most like to hear. God actually uses all the love languages in showing us he loves us.

God shows his love in his WORDS

The Bible is sometimes called 'God's Word'. It's the way God speaks to us. We hear God's words of affirmation, encouragement, guidance and self-revelation when we

- read the Bible and meditate on it
- hear it read, taught or sung in worship services
- study it with a group or in a course
- recall what we have read, heard, studied or sung at unexpected moments in our day-to-day life.

In the Bible God tells us about God's love: God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

As the children's song says: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so'.

God shows his love by spending TIME with us

In Joshua 1:5 God tells us about the time he spends with us: 'I will *never* leave you nor forsake you'.

No one but God can make that kind of unconditional 'never/always/forever' promise!

God shows his love by SERVING us

The Bible tells us that God has done and made for us absolutely everything we will ever need — and more.

A repeated phrase in the book of Psalms is: 'The Lord *has done* great things for us'.

God shows his love by giving us GIFTS

God has done for us and given to us everything we need.

Jesus is the greatest gift God has given us: 'For God so loved the world that he *gave* his one and only Son so that that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'. (John 3:16)

God shows his love by TOUCHING

God is spirit — a supernatural being. Spirits can't touch us in a physical way, but there are times when God touches people by a special experience of his Spirit.

More often, God puts us in relationship with other people who do the touching for God, eg as parents, when we hold and massage and hug our child we are acting as God's loving, touching hands.

God provides sacraments (baptism and Holy Communion) in which God actually touches

The five love languages form the framework for the model worship service in this resource.

us through physical elements of water, bread and wine.

THE LOVE LANGUAGES OF CHRISTMAS

The motto on the Uniting Church's postcard — There's no time like the present; there's no present like your time — draws attention to two of the love languages. The others are there as well in the mystery of God's incarnation (his becoming a human being) at Christmas.

TIME: Jesus came to earth as a human being at a specific time in history. As a human being he loved people and spent time — quality time — with them. The gospels are full of accounts of the time Jesus spent, particularly with his disciples, in conversation and shared experiences.

We can respond at Christmas time by spending time with others: when we see them as people whom Jesus loves. Like Jesus we can use that time to focus on their needs, listen and talk with them and share experiences with them.

We can also spend time with Jesus in worship at church, in small groups, in our families and individually.

GIFTS: Jesus came to earth as God's amazing gift to us. As a human being, Jesus spent his life-blood to purchase for us the gift of forgiveness, freedom from sin and eternal life with God.

We can respond at Christmas as we give gifts to one another. The best gift can be our time. The best present can be our presence.

We can also give gifts to people beyond our circle of family and friends; people who are not in a position to repay the gifts.

Many people now use charitable organisations' Christmas gift catalogues to purchase gifts for our family and friends that actually benefit people in need.

WORDS: John described Jesus as 'the word made flesh who came and dwelt among us.'

As a human being, Jesus was able to speak in human language; to understand and use human imagery — to help us know of God's love as he taught and preached, and his words were recorded in the Bible.

We can respond at Christmas time by hearing what Jesus had to say and hearing about what he did. And, we can speak to him in prayer: words of praise, affirmation, and thanksgiving, as well as confession and petition for ourselves and others.

We can also respond by following his example and his commands to love and serve one another.

SERVICE: Jesus came to serve.

As a human being, Jesus demonstrated service in simple acts like washing his disciples feet, as well as by his healing miracles and, most importantly, dying for us.

We can respond at Christmas time by serving others in our community and the wider world: learning more about their needs and doing what we can to provide their needs.

TOUCH: Jesus came as a human being so that God could physically touch, and be touched by, the people he loved.

As a baby, Jesus was fed by his mother and cuddled by his parents. As a man he reached out to people with a healing touch, and all sorts of people came to him and touched him. He called children to him and blessed them with his touch. After his death and resurrection his disciples saw and touched his wounded body.

We can respond at Christmas time by imagining and helping our children to imagine what it feels like to be touched by Jesus. And we can bless others with our caring physical touch.

A WAY OF REMEMBERING THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

Draw around your hand on a piece of paper.

In the centre of your palm draw a heart. Inside the heart write names of the people whom you love the most dearly.

On each finger write one of the love languages.

Put 'time' on your thumb. Your thumb can connect with each of the other fingers. 'Time' is a component of all the love languages: it takes time to speak, give gifts, touch and to do things with and for others.



If you actually cut out the hand shape, you can touch a finger to each person named in your heart and consider how you 'speak' that love language to that person.

You can also use the same hand to think about the way God loves you.

God said: 'I have written your name on the palms of my hands'. (Isaiah 49:16 NIRV)

LOVE LANGUAGES AT CHRISTMAS

A SKIT

A private investigator watches the Harte family on Christmas Eve to discover how they 'love one another as Jesus loved them'. At various points the family 'freezes' in their actions and the PI comments.

The dialogue is suggested only. Actors improvise around the suggestions.

CHARACTERS

- PI, a private investigator
- Amos
- Bea
- Cedric
- Mum
- Grandad

PI may dress like and imitate a TV or film detective.

The five Hartes can be any family configuration you want. The kids can be any gender and any age. Use their real names.

SETTING

The setting is a family lounge room. Keep this as simple as possible. You will need some seating, a table and a Christmas tree.

PROPS

(These may change as you adapt the skit to your situation and your players.)

- a soft toy & Christmas wrappings
- a bowl of potatoes & peeler
- an angel costume & gaffer tape
- a string of Christmas lights
- a musical instrument
- 2 envelopes with charity gift cards: One in an envelope, the other in a large parcel surrounded with lots of packing.
- a wrapped music CD
- a wrapped book of Sudoku puzzles
- a basin of water & towel.

SCENE 1 — TIME

PI (standing in front of the scene, to the congregation): Shhhh. We're going to be looking at what happens in the Harte home. I have it on good authority that they love one another. Let's see what it looks like.

PI Moves to the side.

Amos (sitting on the floor, surrounded by a mess of wrapping paper, ribbons, sticky tape, etc. Trying unsuccessfully to wrap an awkward-shaped soft toy): Ahhhh! This is a mess! I've got to get it wrapped before Bea sees it. I haven't got time to do it right!

Amos (after a bit more struggling): Muuum! Have you got time to help me?

Mum (offstage). Oh Amos, I'm really pushed for time. I have to get the salads ready for tomorrow's barbeque. But, I always have time for you.

Mum (walking into the room, calls over her shoulder): Bea, have you got time to finish peeling the potatoes?

Mum sits down beside **Amos** and they work together to wrap the parcel.

Bea (offstage): Oh, Mum. I've only got a few minutes to get my costume ready for the play, and these angel wings won't stay on. But I guess I can find time for you.

Bea (walking into the room with a bowl of potatoes and a peeler, calls over her shoulder): Grandad, Have you got time to fix my angel wings?

Bea sits and peels potatoes.

Grandad (offstage): Sorry, love. I need all the time I can find to untangle these Christmas lights. If I don't get them done tonight, we'll have to do without. But, I guess I can spare a few minutes for you.

Grandad (walking into the room with an angel costume and some gaffer tape, calls over his shoulder): Cedric, Could you possibly spare some time to look at the Christmas lights?

Grandad: sits and fiddles with angel costume.

Cedric: You've got to be kidding, Grandad. I've got to practice my trumpet (or another instrument) solo. But I guess I can take time for you.

Cedric: walks into the room with tangled strand of Christmas lights and a trumpet and sits down to sort the lights.

Amos: Hey, Cedric, give me your trumpet. Mum and I are almost finished here.

Amos starts playing a simple Christmas song.

Mum (looks around, and sighs): Isn't it lovely to spend time together at Christmas.

FREEZE

PI (in front of scene, to congregation): Well, from what we've seen so far, I'd guess that time — time for one another and time together — must be a big part of loving one another.

PI moves off to the side.

FAMILY (except for **Amos**) moves off-stage, taking their props with them.

PI: Let's see what happens now.

SCENE 2 — GIFTS

Amos (taking the wrapped parcel, labelled **Bea**) This was a pain to wrap, but I'm sure **Bea** will love it. She loves cuddly toys and doesn't have one like this. (Puts the parcel under the tree and exits.)

In quick succession **OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY** enter the room with parcels, look around to make sure no-one sees them, puts their parcel under the tree, make their comment and exit.

Mum (with a decorated envelope, labelled 'Grandad', that contains a charity gift card): It's so hard to pick something for Dad. He always says he has everything he needs. I hope he'll like this.

Bea (with a parcel labelled **Cedric**, containing a CD with music by a musician playing **Cedric's** instrument): Gifts embarrass **Cedric**. But I know he has wanted this CD for a long time.

Grandad (with a large parcel, labelled 'Mum'. It contains a lot of packing and an envelope with exactly the same charity gift as before): It's so hard to pick something for [Mum's name]. She always says she has everything she needs. I guess there are some nice things she might like to have, but I reckon she'll be really chuffed with this.

Cedric (with a parcel labelled 'Amos', which contains a Sudoku game book.) It's not much. But it's the best I could do.

PI (to the congregation): Well, it's Christmas. Christmas — presents. They go together, don't they? Looks like gifts must be a part of loving one another.

Let's see what else they have to show us.

SCENE 3 — SERVICE

Mum (entering the room and looking around): Oh my, I've got a lot of work before we can do Secret Santa.

Amos: Wrong, Mum. We have a lot of work to do. How about I straighten up in here.

Amos gets to work.

Bea (offstage): I'll organise the kitchen stuff, Mum.

Mum: Thanks, kids. That would be a big help.

Grandad (entering with lights): Well. I got the lights sorted.

Amos: Don't you get up on the chair, Grandad. Let me help.

Amos and **Grandad** organise lights.

Mum: That doesn't leave anything for me to do.

Bea and **3** enter with a basin of warm water and a towel.

Bea: Oh yes there is. You've got to sit down, take off your shoes, and soak your feet.

Mum: What!?

Grandad: Just sit down and enjoy it, love. Let somebody else serve you for a change.

FREEZE

PI (moves in front of the scene; to the congregation): Well, that was a bit of a surprise — to me as much as to Mum. (Counting off on fingers) Time . . . gifts . . . service. That's what the Hartes have shown us about loving one another.

Wait. It looks like there could be something more.

SCENE 4 — WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Kids 1 and **2** exit.

Cedric and **Grandad** sit down beside **Mum**.

Mum (wiggling her toes): Mmmmm. That does feel good.

Bea (entering with a plate of snacks): Secret Santa time!

Amos (entering with a plastic rubbish bag): Secret Santa time!

Grandad (to Mum and **Cedric**): Do you get the feeling it's Secret Santa time?

Cedric: Of course it is, Grandad. Can I give out the loot?

Grandad (looking around for approval): Sure, go ahead, Champ.

Cedric: (taking **Bea** parcel): I bet I know what this is. Can I squeeze it?

Mum: You'd best be careful. Just give it to **Bea**.

Bea (Opens the parcel, lets out a screech): Oh, it's the cutest thing ever. (Hugs the soft toy, shows it off to everyone and sits down stroking it.) Thanks, Secret Santa, whoever you are.

Cedric (giving Grandad his envelope): Looks like you just got a card, Grandad.

Grandad (opens the envelope, takes out the card and reads): 'Enough vegetable seeds to feed a family of four has been sent in your honour to a family in Africa.'

Well now, isn't that the strangest thing. My Secret Santa must know just how I think and must know what would make me really happy.

Cedric: Yeah, Grandad. I guess it's not just a card.

Cedric (taking the Cedric parcel). This one's for me. (Opens the parcel and takes out the CD): Suuper! I don't like surprises. I've wanted this one forever, but it's hard to find. I've got a great Secret Santa.

Grandad: There's more under the tree.

Cedric (pulling the large Mum parcel): This one's for Mum.

Mum: I wonder what this could be.

Bea — still holding the soft toy, helps **MUM** one handed.

Grandad: Be careful you don't toss out the good stuff.

Mum (finds the envelope and giving Grandad a grin, opens it and reads the card): 'Enough vegetable seeds to feed a family of four has been sent in your honour to a family in Africa.'

Now, isn't that the strangest thing. My Secret Santa knows just how I think and what makes me happy.

Amos: Is there anything else, Squirt?

Cedric: Goes slowly to the tree and takes the Amos parcel): Yeah, it's for you. (Hands it to Amos shyly and almost reluctantly).

Amos (unwraps the parcel and takes out the book): Cool. Really cool! This will keep the old brain cells working right through the school holidays. (Opening the book): Hey look here, Squirt. There are some really easy ones. Do you want me to show you how to do them?

Cedric: Um, yeah. That'd be great.

FREEZE

PI (in front of the scene, to congregation): Did you notice how everyone said something nice about the person who had chosen the gift for them. Even though they didn't know who it was?

Or did they?

Anyway, saying nice things to people and about them must be part of loving one another.

Oh, look. They're not finished yet.

PI moves aside.

SCENE 5 — TOUCH

Amos: This has been great. Thanks everybody.

Mum: There's only one thing more to make it perfect.

Cedric: I know. If we clean up the mess. Come on Bea.

Bea (still holding the soft toy) makes the rounds with the rubbish bag and everyone puts their rubbish in it.

Mum: Well done. But there's still one thing more.

Grandpa: And I know what it is. (Holds out his arms to sign a hug)

Kids 1, 2, and 3: Group hug! Group hug.

They crowd around Mum and Grandad for a hug.

FREEZE

PI (in front of the scene, to congregation) Now isn't that touching. Pardon the pun. I think that's it. I'll run out of fingers if there's any more.

(Counting on fingers)Loving one another is about time with one another . . .
serving one another . . .
giving gifts to one another . . .
saying nice words to one another . . .
and touching one another.

I reckon we can let the Hartes know we've been here watching them.

(Entering the scene): Thanks guys, for showing us five ways of loving one another. Why don't you get up and take a bow.

FAMILY stand and bow. **PI** leads applause.

FAMILY and **PI** exit, clearing the set.



CHRISTMAS TIME IN OUR HOUSE



<p>THURSDAY, 24 DECEMBER, CHRISTMAS EVE</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>When the time was right, God sent his Son, and a woman gave birth to him. (Galatians 4:4)</i></p>
<p>FRIDAY, 25 DEC, CHRISTMAS DAY</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>Now at last, God sent his Son to bring his message to us. (Hebrews 1:1,2)</i></p>
<p>SATURDAY, 26 DEC, BOXING DAY</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>Don't spend time thinking about what you will eat or drink. Don't worry about it. (Luke 12:29)</i></p>
<p>SUNDAY, 27 DEC</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>The Lord is good. His faithful love continues forever. It will last for all time to come. (Psalm 100:5)</i></p>
<p>MONDAY, 28 DEC</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>As long as the earth lasts, there will always be ... summer and winter, day and night. (Genesis 8:22)</i></p>
<p>TUESDAY, 29 DEC</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>Christ died for us at a time when we were helpless and sinful. (Romans 5:6)</i></p>
<p>WEDNESDAY, 30 DEC</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>I will spend time thinking about everything you have done. I will consider all of your mighty acts. (Psalm 77:12)</i></p>
<p>THURSDAY, 31 DEC NEW YEAR'S EVE</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>My times are in your hands. (Psalm 31:15)</i></p>
<p>FRIDAY, 1 JANUARY NEW YEAR'S DAY</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever. What he wants to do will last for all time. (Psalm 33:11)</i></p>
<p>SATURDAY, 2 JAN</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>Teach us to use wisely all the time we have. (Psalm 90:12)</i></p>
<p>SUNDAY, 3 JAN</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>After Jesus' birth, Wise Men came to Jerusalem. 'Where is the child who has been born to be king?' (Matthew 2:1,2)</i></p>
<p>MONDAY, 4 JAN</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>'...When we were in the east, we saw his star...' (Matthew 2:2)</i></p>
<p>TUESDAY, 5 JAN</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>'...Now we have come to worship him.' (Matthew 2:2)</i></p>
<p>WEDNESDAY, 6 JAN, TWELFTH NIGHT</p> <p>Read, discuss, pray: <i>Give praise to the One who was before all time, who now is, and who will be forever. Amen. (Jude 1:25)</i></p>



CHRISTMAS TIME IN OUR HOUSE

One of the best ways we can show our love for other people is by giving them our time.

It takes time to time to listen to them and talk with them.

It takes time to time to do things for them, to do things with them and to watch them doing things.

It takes time to make or select and purchase appropriate gifts, and time to show appreciation for gifts.

It takes a moment to give a hug or a high five, and more time to hold someone who is hurting.

Plan NOW to give the present of your time to one another and other people in your community during Christmas time.

Some 'timely' things you can do:

- Use the Christmas Time calendar to plan together your family's time for the holiday. Be intentional in planning time together with your family and time for caring for people (or a particular person) outside of your family. Then be intentional about carrying out your plans.
- Make a time capsule. Include photos of yourselves, stories about what has happened this Christmas, and your hopes for the new year. Hide the capsule away and open it a year from now.
- Make a chain of 168 (the number of hours in a week) paper loops. Use different coloured paper to indicate the way you use those hours: sleeping, eating, playing, travelling, watching TV . . . When you're finished, see if you would like to make some adjustments to your schedule.
- Hide all the clocks in your house and try to live a day without keeping track of time.
- Make a sundial clock. You'll find instructions at 'sciencekidsathome' and other web sites.
- As you take down Christmas decorations, share the stories of the decorations: When did they come into your family? What is the symbolism behind the decoration — the picture, shape or colour? Save some decorations (and their stories) to build a family Christmas tradition.

Plan NOW to take some time each day intentionally sharing God's Christmas message with your family.

A way of sharing God's message with your family

Use the Christmas Time calendar as a reminder to set aside some time (perhaps 10 minutes at bedtime) to think about God's part in your day.

- Share your highs and lows — the best things and the worst things that have happened that day. This could be things you have done or things that have been done to you.
- Read the Bible passage for the day. You can read it from the calendar. If you have a Bible, it's a good idea to find it in your Bible as well. Look at the verses around it to discover who was talking/writing and what was happening when he said/or wrote it. If you have a different translation, compare the wording. If you find the verse helpful, highlight it in your Bible.
- Think about the Bible verse as God speaking to you. Talk about how God's words relate to the highs and lows of your day.
- Pray for one another. Pray about your highs and lows and God's words to you. In your prayers, praise and thank God as well as asking for what you need.
- Bless one another. Hold hands and say: 'Christmas is about God's love. God loves you and I do too'.

A SAMPLE WORSHIP PLAN

The format of this service is similar to the traditional carols and readings: with a song between each item of the service. You may omit some of the songs and/or limit the number of verses.

Suggested wording for some parts of the service are in *italic*.

[🕒] Each time the words 'it's time' are spoken, the speakers can first look at their watches.

1. PREPARATION TIME

As people arrive, the **HOSPITALITY TEAM** directs them to a craft table where there is a supply of various colours of paper or light-weight card, pencils and scissors.

People help one another to draw around their hand, forming an outline of their hand on paper. They cut out the hands and take their cut-out hand (and something to write with) into the worship area.

(See page 13 for more about this activity).

2. SETTLING IN TIME

Beginning about 15 minutes before the advertised start of service, **MUSIC TEAM** leads the singing of a medley of favourite/familiar Christmas songs.

HOSPITALITY TEAM greets people as they arrive, helps them settle in the worship area and invites them to join in the carol singing.

3. STARTING TIME

As a signal that formal worship is about to start, the **MUSIC/TECH TEAM** plays the sound of Westminster Chimes chiming your worship start time. Alternatively show the 'German Westminster Chimes' from YouTube.

WORSHIP LEADER: [🕒] *It's time for Christmas — time to celebrate Jesus' birthday. Why don't you stand and wave your [paper] hands in the air.*

It's great to see that whole room of hands waving in celebration.

[🕒] *It's time to worship. Let's sing.*

4. FIRST SONG TIME

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing an opening song, eg

- *Come, now is the time to worship* (Vineyard)
- *O come all ye faithful*

5. STORY TIME

WL: *Birthdays are a good time to remember what happened when you were born. Do you know your birthday story?*

You may invite people to share their stories in small groups or families.

[🕒] *It's time to hear Jesus' birthday story.*

Tell the story of Jesus birth from Luke 2:1-8.

Some ways of doing this are:

- simply read the story from a contemporary translation of the Bible
the reader may stand beside a large picture of the nativity or the picture may be projected on screen
- tell the story while showing lego-style illustrations. See www.bricktestament.com or make your own set of scenes using Lego, a nativity set or live actors
- read the story, using hand gestures that people can copy. One person can read the story with another person demonstrating the actions. See page 11 for suggestions.

WL: *Many of us already know that story, but I love to hear it over and over.*

6. SECOND SONG TIME

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing

- *I love to tell the story* (Hankey)
www.hymnsite.com
- *Little children, do you know*
- a Christmas carol that tells the story, eg *Infant holy, infant lowly*

7. BIBLE TIME

WL: [🕒] *It's time to think about why Jesus was born at Christmas.*

READER: *That's easy. The answer to the 'why' question is right here in the Bible.*

READER reads John 3:16

WL: *Jesus came because God loved us! That's pretty clear.*

READER: *There's more. Later when he was grown up, Jesus explained it. He said:*

READER reads John 13:34.

8. THIRD SONG TIME

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing

- *Love one another* (All Together Again #177)
- *Love came down at Christmas*

9. INVESTIGATION TIME

WL: Loving one another as Jesus loved us. That sounds more like something we do than something we feel.

[🕒] *I think it's time to investigate how we can love one another Jesus' way.*

A group of **ACTORS** presents the 'Love Languages at Christmas' skit (see page 14-16). Alternatively someone can simply explain the concepts.

10. HAND WRITING TIME

WL: I want to remember what the investigator counted off on his fingers.

[🕒] *It's time to get out your paper hands again.*

WL leads people through the activity.

First, let's write 'time' on our thumbs. There's no present like our time. It takes time to love people in any of the other ways.

Second, let's write 'words' on our pointer fingers.

Third, let's write 'service' on our middle finger.

Fourth, let's write 'gifts' on our ring finger.

Finally, let's write 'touch' on our little finger.

11. FOURTH SONG TIME

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing a celebration song, eg:

- O thou holiest
- Jesus put this song, Graham Kendrick (*All Together Everybody* #258)

12. CONFESSION TIME

WL: [🕒] *It's time to get real!*

Does your household look like the Harte's household? Mine doesn't. In fact, I'm not completely sure I want it to. Do you?

Let's pray about that.

The prayer of confession can be led by the WL, the PRAYER LEADER, or five different people.

Dear loving God, I know you want me to love the people around me as completely as you do. But I just don't manage it.

I'm selfish about my time. Hey, I even think of it as 'my' time. I don't use very much of it to love other people.

The things I say to the people around me are often cruel and unkind rather than loving and helpful.

I expect people to give me great gifts, and I'm more concerned about what I get than what I can give.

I expect people to serve me, and make my life pleasant and easy instead of taking the time and effort to help and serve other people.

Sometimes I hurt people by hitting or slapping them or not hugging them when they need it.

You know all this already, God. But now I'm saying that I'm beginning to recognise my lack of love.

Please forgive me.

And please change my attitude to be more like Jesus' attitude of love and service. Amen.

WL or MINISTER: God's love for you includes forgiveness. God forgives us when we tell him we are sorry and ask for his forgiveness and admit we need his help.

Take that forgiveness as still another great gift this Christmas.

13. FIFTH SONG TIME

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing — or a group of children may sing — a children's Christmas song, eg

- Away in a manger
- I know God loves me
- In a little stable

14. TEACHING TIME/SERMON

MINISTER/PASTOR/PRIEST works with the congregation to explore the way Christmas reveals God speaking to us in the five love languages. Use the paper hands to do this.

[🕒] *It's time to think some more about God's love at Christmas.*

Take your paper hand. I'd like you to think of the hand as the hand of God.

The Bible tells us something very interesting about that hand of God. God said: 'I have written your name on the palm of my hand'. (Isaiah 49:16 NIRV)

Please write your name right there on the palm of your paper hand (your picture of God's hand).

Allow time.

What do you think it means that God has written your name on his hand? For me it is an assurance that God really loves me and never, ever will forget me.

Christmas is a special time for us to remember how God loves us.

At Christmas, God came to earth as a tiny baby. The Baby Jesus had real human hands. At first they were only this big.

Ask parents of an infant in the congregation to hold up that baby's hand OR show a cut out of

a baby hand OR show on the screen a photo of a baby's hand.

Your names and my name were written on that baby Jesus' hand — because God loves us and this baby was God.

Jesus grew up as a real human child. In time, he learned all kinds of things to do with his hands. Jesus hands grew bigger.

Show a child's hand in the same way as above.

Your names and my name were written on the child Jesus' hand — because God loves us and this child was God.

Jesus became an adult. And as a grown-up he used those hands to love the people around him.

[You may show illustrations of the following stories from Jesus' life.]

Jesus used those hands to heal people.

He used them to hold children.

He used them to give people food.

He used them to wash his friend's feet.

Show a large man's hand in the same way as above.

Your names and my name were written on Jesus' grown-up hands — because God loves us and the man Jesus was God.

Then Jesus' used his hands as part of the greatest present anyone could ever give us.

Jesus died in our place — so that we could live forever with the God who loves us.

Nails were hammered through Jesus' hands as he was hung on a cross for us.

[You may show an illustration of Jesus' wounded hands.]

Jesus came back to life again, and his friends could see and touch the wounds in his hands.

Your names and my name were written on Jesus' wounded hands — because God loves us and that man who died and rose again for us was God.

As a baby and as a grown-up, Jesus loved us.

Jesus was God's gift to us.

Jesus spent time with us.

Jesus spoke with us.

Jesus served us.

And Jesus touched us.

That's the wonderful news of Christmas. You can believe it. Because God tells us so.

15. SIXTH SONG TIME

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing

- *Jesus loves me, this I know.*

Encourage children (or everyone) to wave their paper hands as they sing.

16. ANNOUNCEMENT TIME

WL: makes necessary brief announcements.

- Show the Christmas Time in Our House take-home calendar (see page 17,18). Explain that it is intended to help people plan their time at Christmas time and practice the love languages.
- Invite worshipers to after-service activities or refreshments.
- Invite worshipers to further activities and services of the congregation, including prayers for individuals after the service.

17. OFFERING TIME

WL: [☺] *It's time to show our love for Jesus by giving a gift of money. Your gift today will be used to share God's love by* [explanation of the way the offering will be used].

The offering is collected in your usual manner.

18. SEVENTH SONG TIME

During or after the offering the **MUSIC TEAM** may lead or perform

- an offering song, eg *Take us now, we are yours*, Chris Jaensch (*All Together Everybody* #265)
- a Christmas song, eg *Come hither, you children*

19. PRAYER TIME

PRAYER LEADER/S [☺] *It's time to pray.*

PL leads the congregation in a Christmas prayer. Include:

Thanks and praise for

- God's love shown to the world at Christmas
- the love that people have shown to us
- the privilege of using our time to love people through our words, our acts of service, our gifts and our touch.

Petitions for

- people who need to know about God's love
- people who need practical demonstrations of our love and care
- people who give this practical love to others, through kind words, generous gifts, healing touch and selfless service
- other concerns of the congregation, community, nation and world.

You may conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

20. BLESSING TIME

WL: [☺] *It's almost time to go home. As you go, take with you this blessing.*

WL says or a **SOLOIST** sings

- *May the feet of God (A Christmas blessing)*

WL: *Have a great Christmas. Love one another as Jesus loves you.*

[☺] *There's time for one more song.*

23. FINAL SONG TIME

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing a closing Christmas song, eg

- Go tell it on the mountain
- Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

24. FELLOWSHIP TIME

As people leave the worship area, the **HOSPITALITY TEAM** gives each family a copy of the Christmas Time in Our House calendar and wishes them a happy Christmas.

Worshippers are invited to enjoy tea, coffee and fruit cordial along with Arnotts 'Tick Tock' biscuits and/or homemade Christmas biscuits or cake.