Acts of Worship and Prayers on the Theme of "Everyone is Special"

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The following notes are a series of suggestions to help with the planning of Acts of Worship or other prayer occasions based on a theme of "Everyone is Special".

It could be said that most prayers already in use in Scouting are quite suitable as they are, e.g. prayers on 'teamwork', ‘co-operation with others', 'sharing', a prayer for understanding.

Try a variety of approaches as stimuli for your Act of Worship. You could use slides, tapes, 'feely bags', a speaker, newspaper clippings and so on.

You might like to start your Act of Worship in a 'different' way, perhaps by signing a simple phrase such as GOD IS LOVE and showing each participant how to repeat it until the whole gathering signs it together.

Hopefully you will have provoked some thoughts and awakened an interest that will naturally lead to further discussion among those participating.

If you are involving a speaker make sure they are 'briefed' and know what is expected of them.

When using any of these suggestions or passages (or any others) remember that the Act of Worship needs to be relevant to those participating. You may find that you need to adapt some passages to shorten them or to simplify the language.

Selection from 'GIVE US THIS DAY' (Charles Buckmaster), Peter Smith Ltd., Derby.

Help us O Lord, at all times, to do the things we ought to do,
Grant to each one of us,
Clear sight, that we may know what to do,
Courage, to take the first steps,
Skill, to find a way through our difficulties as they arise, Perseverance, to keep going till the task is finished, Strength, to resist all temptations which seek to divert our minds;
Help us to begin, to continue, and to end all things in you....

0 God our Father, in the work we have undertaken to do, help us;
To walk in your light
To act in your strength
To think in your wisdom
To speak in your truth
To live in your love.....

Almighty Father, who sent your Son into the world to show us how to live together,
Teach us to be kind, understanding and sympathetic in all we do,
Give us steadfastness of purpose, clearness of vision, sincerity of aim;
Direct us in hopes and ideals, and draw us closer to one another and to you...

Help us to always remember our commitment to serve others and support those in need.
Lord, what we know not, teach us
Lord, what we have not, give us
Lord, what we are not, make us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

FROM THE INSIDE
I live in a body labelled; 'handicapped'
Stunted legs and arms askew
I live in a body I wouldn't have chosen
But then few of us do.

People say I'm brave
As though bravery were a choice
I learned early not to scream
For mine is an unheard of voice.

The world is competitive
And I'm ill equipped to compete
But I'm no less of a person
Because I am not complete.

I live in a body labelled; 'second rate'
Though I feel second to none
When society knows the difference
Then my battle is won.

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LEARNING TO LIVE
If young people live with criticism - they learn to criticise.
If young people live with hostility - they learn to fight.
If young people live with ridicule - they learn to feel shy.
If young people live with shame - they learn to feel guilt.
If young people live with tolerance - they learn to be patient
If young people live with encouragement - they learn confidence
If young people live with praise - they learn to appreciate.
If young people live with fairness - they learn justice.
If young people live with security - they learn to have faith.
If young people live with approval - they learn to like themselves
If young people live with acceptance and friendship - they learn to find love in the world.

HANDS
What a wondrous work of art is the human hand
The hand that tills the land
The skilled hand of the surgeon,
The hand stretched forth to bless,
The rough hand of the miner,
The smooth hand's warm caress.

The hands of the musician,
The hands that scrub the floors,
The hands that tend the plant life of God's great out of doors.

May all our hands be clean hands
At home, at work, at play,
In the hollow of Thine own hand,
Lord, keep us day by day.

'A CLOSED HAND CAN'T RECEIVE' - (Anon)
A closed hand can't receive. This phrase has a wisdom that applies profoundly to everyday human affairs. The man who will not share himself with his neighbour receives little friendship in return.
The tight parental grip that holds children too closely defeats its own purpose in the end.

It's no accident, probably, that in many countries the symbol of totalitarianism is one that you can't shake hands with; a clenched fist.

To be a sower of seeds, a man must have his hand open, and clearly he must do this before he can reap. And the process doesn't stop there. To possess knowledge or wisdom, he must open his mind. If he wants to receive love, he must offer it - and to do this he must have an open heart.

Look around, and you *will* see the truth of these five words shining everywhere. A closed hand can't receive partly because it is shut and nothing can get in. But mostly because it has nothing to give.

'MY FAMILY' (Malcolm Treacher) - for use with young children.
The other day I asked a boy about his family...

'Well" he said, 'there is my brother who swims better than me, but I can beat him at football! and my other brother who has lots of 'A' levels, but then I don't want to be a School Teacher.

I've got a sister who can't see very well, and in fact she's nearly blind, but she copes quite well with our help.

There's my little brother, I push him around quite a bit..... in his wheelchair that is.

Our older brother, he is black, some people don't like him much, but I do.

And another sister that stays in bed all the time, not because she wants to, she will never be able to get up. She's not strong enough, but she has a lovely face and the most beautiful smile you'll ever see.

Then I've got several brothers and sisters overseas, and some I've never actually met

'You seem to have a lot of brothers and sisters" I said.

"But of course I have," he replied, "we are all the family of God."

'THE NEW BOY'
Sister warned me on my arrival at Troop Meeting, that we had a 'new boy' in the ward, 'He could be a bit difficult" she said. The atmosphere was not its normal lively self in the Day Room, the 'new boy' had already made his mark in upsetting a number of people, and my being introduced to him resulted in a long stare, silence, and a rapid swing of the wheelchair to face the other way.

The rest of the meeting was full of disruptions, arguments, in fact a total disaster. At the end of the evening the Leaders had a long discussion with Sister as to whether it was worth trying to

integrate this lad into the Troop, which after all was complicated enough with five wheelchairs, a couple of leg irons, and youngsters that fall over at the slightest knock, so a further wheelchair boy who deliberately drives into all and sundry wasn't exactly an asset.

Sister explained that Peter, our new lad, had been located in a home basically for the elderly, where he had been placed quite small, and had experienced a somewhat uninteresting life to date, consisting of being got up in the morning, dressed, fed and sat in the window most of the day, with an occasional push outside, fed, washed, undressed and put back to bed. Little had been done about any education for him, or mixing him with his own age group - so, could we not expect a rather difficult boy under the circumstances?

We went through several hard weeks of disruptions, tears and frustrations, without a lot of progress. The other youngsters, bless them, put a great deal of effort into trying to help Peter, so too the Leaders and hospital staff. Slowly he began to take an interest, even when sulking in a corner you could see his eyes creep round and watch as we were doing some activity and having fun. A strange thing that I had noticed all this time, we had never seen Peter smile, it was as if he just didn't know how, and this I found very sad.

Then it happened. At the beginning of one evening I was rummaging through the Troop cupboard for some gear, and pulled out an old pair of boxing gloves, Peter was just beside me at the time and pointed to the gloves, “try them on" I said, and we got his somewhat uncontrollable arms steady and his hands in the gloves, I gave him a playful punch to the chest, and in a flash his right arm came round from nowhere catching me on the jaw, and the next moment I was flat on my back.

The ward hushed, Sister ran down to see what had happened, I sat up and glared at Peter who suddenly let out a yell of delight and burst into laughter, joined by Sister, then the others, and myself. Peter held out his arms to help me up, he pulled me close, and in a tight embrace we laughed and cried together for a while - we had won through. Peter eventually became one of the finest Patrol Leaders we ever had in the Troop.

Short.stories from 'life'situations, like the one above, from Malcolm Treacher's collection; 'Moments in Time make good readings as they relate to first hand human relationships. There are several like this in the book 'Words for Worship' by C Campling and M Davis.

A NURSE'S PRAYER'- by Alwyn M Law
Lord, give me grace, on this and every day.
To do my work the best, not the simplest way,
And to remember that in all I do,
The very smallest task, is seen by you.

Grant me the courage, Lord, when things go wrong, to stop and think, and not rush blindly on,
And though the task I'm set, may not seem fair,
may I remember that Thou too, art there.

Give me a humble heart, that I may know,
That things worthwhile, are not just things that show. For Thou efficiency and skill mean much,
the greatest gift of all, is Human Touch.

Fill me with love, that I may realise,
The suffering and the pain that round me lies.
And grant each day, that I may seek to share, The burdens of the people, in my care.

Lord, give me strength, to help me play my part,
To make my work the essence of my heart;
And show me patience, and true kindness Lord,
That I may spread Thy radiance through my ward.

So, when at night, I come back to my rest,
I pray that I may feel I've done my best.
And, Lord, at times I know I forget Thee,
But please forgive, and always be with me.

'HEAVEN'S VERY SPECIAL CHILD' (Edna Massimilla)
A meeting was held quite far from earth
'It's time again for another birth"
Said the angels to the Lord above
'This special child will need much love
His progress may seem very slow
accomplishments he may not show,
And he'll require extra care
From the folks he meets way down there.
He may not run or laugh or play;
His thoughts may seem quite far away.
In many ways he won't adapt
and he'll be known as handicapped.
So let's be careful where he's sent,
We want his life to be content.
Please, Lord, find parents who
will do a special job for you,
They will not realise right away
the leading role they're asked to play.
But with this child sent from above
Comes stronger faith and richer love
And soon they'll know the privilege given
In caring for this gift from Heaven.

Their precious charge so meek and mild
Is Heaven's very Special Child."

'WHEN I WHINE' (Rev. Ralph Gonichelis (U.S.A.))
The other day upon a bus, I saw a girl with golden hair. I envied her - she looked so fine
and I wished I were so fair,
Then suddenly she rose to leave,
I watched her hobble down the aisle,
She had but one leg, bore a crutch,
and as she passed - a smile.
O God forgive me when I whine
I have two legs, the world is mine!

Still later, passing down the street,
I saw a child with eyes of blue
He stood and watched the others play,
it seemed to me he knew not what to do.
I stood a while and then I said
'Why don't you join the others dear?"
He looked ahead without a word,
and then I knew he could not hear.
O God forgive me when I whine
I have two ears, the World is mine!

Later I paused to buy some sweets,
the lad who sold them had such charm,
I stayed to talk with him for a while,
if I were late, it would be no harm.
Then as I turned to leave, he said,
'Thank you, you have been so kind,
I like to talk with folks like you
You see I'm blind."
O God forgive me when I whine
I have two eyes, the World is mine!

Two legs to take me where I'd go,
Two eyes to see the sunset glow;
Two ears to hear what I would know.
O God forgive me when I whine -
I'm blessed indeed - the World is mine.

From 'NEW EVERY MORNING' (BBC)
35 Marylebone High Street, London WIM 4AA

Heavenly Father, we pray for all who suffer incurable illness or handicap.
May we remember that these conditions are of the physical body, and through such conditions and difficulties we can discover a way to deeper awareness of the life of the spirit.
Through pain and weariness we are not alone, but in fellowship with Christ, with whom we can learn to understand better the sufferings of mankind.

From 'STREAMS OF PRAYER '(Tony Ashcroft)
Mayhew-McGrimmond Ltd., Gt Wakering, Essex,

'PRAYING HANDS'
When our hands are closed to the needs of others, forgive us Lord.
Lord, give us strength to come to you with open hands - hands that are empty,
Ready to receive and to give.
May they always be stretched out in gentleness and love, may they never hurt, but always ready to serve. Lord, our hands offer you the work they have done, the service you have given to mankind.
There is much our hands have left undone - make them more like yours, Lord.
Open our hands, enable them to give and to protect.

'GIVING HANDS'
Lord, I give you my hands to do your work
I give you my feet to go your way
I give you my eyes to see as you do
I give you my tongue to speak your words
I give you my mind that you may think in me
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me,
above all, I give you my heart.

a further prayer to be read with the above,- (Malcolm Treacher)
Lord, should it be that my hands become unable to do your work then my feet will have to walk twice as far, if my feet were useless, then I would have to look all the harder to see what I could do to fulfil my service. Should my eyes be blind.... but then Lord, I do not need eyes to see as you do, and it does not require a tongue to spread your message of love.
My mind and my spirit are always yours to use Lord, whatever my state, and above all, whatever happens, I can always give you my heart.

'MY BROTHER' From Dr. Roger May,
O Lord grant me, I pray
Quickness of eye to perceive my brother's handicap, and insight to understand him.
Wisdom to appreciate my sister's needs and strength and skill to help her.
Sensitivity to discern my brother's feelings and open-ness to accept and value him.
Joy in my sister's achievements and a cheerful spirit to encourage her.
Appreciation of my brother's worth and gracious words to express it to him.
Thankfulness for all my sister teaches me, and gratitude for the opportunity to serve her.
Through Jesus Christ I ask this.

Two more prayers by Malcolm Treacher:

'SMALL DETAILS'
I watched a child the other day Lord, painting a picture, it was of a flower, in bright colours, and with fine detail, detail that I Lord, in my hurried life, would never have noticed in that flower.
The child was in a wheelchair Lord, where she sits for most of her time, she can never rush around, she had time to look carefully at the small detail of life.
Because of the weakness in her hands she was unable to paint with strong sweeps of the brush, she worked patiently in gentle, almost loving strokes.
Lord, help me.... to give time to the small detail of my life, help me to have patience over things I do, and to work with the loving care of this child.

'HOLD MY HAND'
Sometimes Lord, ft is not easy to pray, not easy to cope with all the pressures of life,
not easy to readily accept things difficult to understand, like illness, a suffering child, a severe handicap.
Not easy to face life's journey as I stumble on, unsure of the direction.
But then I recall those reassuring words;
'Put your hand into the hand of God, for that shall be to you better than a light, and safer than a known way' then gladly I stretch out my hand.
Lord hold my hand .....

THE SUPPORT OF FRIENDSHIP' (Anon)
Lord, just as the rope needs knots to link it to other ropes, so people need friendships to join them with the rest of humanity.
Just as a tent cannot stand on its own, needing guys to support it, so people need the support of others, and of God, to keep them upright.
We thank you, Lord for the friendship and support we receive from those who love us, and care about us, and for whom we care, and love.

BEATITUDES TO FRIENDS OF HANDICAPPED PEOPLE
Blessed are you who take the time to listen to my difficult speech, for you help me to know that if I persevere, I can be understood.
Blessed are you who never bid me to hurry, or take my task from me, and do them for me, for often I need time rather than help.
Blessed are you who stand beside me as I enter new and untried ventures, for my failures will be out-weighed by the times I surprise my self and you.
Blessed are you who ask for my help, for my greatest need is to be needed.
Blessed are you who understand that it is difficult for me to put my thoughts into words.
Blessed are you who, with a smile, encourage me to try once more.
Blessed are you who never remind me, that today, I ask the same question twice.
Blessed are you who respect me and love me as I am, not as you wish I were.

TH/NGS TO *BE THANKFUL FOR'*
The good green earth beneath our feet,
The air we breath, the food we eat,
Some work to do, a goal to win,
A hidden longing deep within
That spurs us on to bigger things
And helps us to meet what each day brings,
All these things and many more
Are the things we should be thankful for....
And most of all our thankful prayers
Should rise to God because he cares!

'FLOWERS WITH STEMS NOT ALWAYS STRAIGHT'
Flowers With stems not always straight,
Grow on the highest hill,
And hopes, like flowers, transcend all bounds,
To blossom-out at will.
Who cares, if there's a twisted branch,
Upon a mountain ash.
And, if the willows all grow straight
They wouldn't shade the path.

The swan that limps when on the land,
Still glides across the lake,
And though the lily bows its head,
The slender stem won't break,
Who cares to run at breakneck speed,
A race for all to see?
The river twists, then falters on,
And then, it meets the sea.

The tallest tree that's in the wood,
Supports the clinging vine,
The elder bush, attracts no looks,
But from it, comes the wine.
And so, we take the path through life,
And each must find his way
But let's give help and love,
And never, ever turn away.

'DARK SHADOWS FALL IN THE LIVES OF US ALL' Sickness and sorrow come to us all,
But through it we grow and learn to 'stand tall' –
For trouble is 'part and parcel of life'
And no man can grow without struggle and strife,
And the more we endure it with patience and grace
The stronger we grow and the more we can face -
And the more we can face, the greater our love,

And with love in our hearts we are more conscious of
The pain and the sorrow in lives everywhere,
So it is through trouble we learn how to share.

A BUDDHIST BLESSING
May you be well and happy;
May you be free from pain and suffering.

SHARING
We share our happiness with each other – and it becomes greater.
We share our troubles with each other – and they become smaller.
We share one another's griefs and burdens – and their weight becomes possible to bear.

REACHING OUT (Christine Rigden)
I feel your pain and long to touch the hurt
And make it melt away
Yes, I know
That I can't really see the breadth
And depth
Of this dark valley you're in,
I can't truly know just how sharp the knife is
In your soul –
For it is you in it's path, not me.
But I have known other valleys
And in my heart still bear knife-wound scars
Even so, I would walk your road and take your pain if I could.
I cannot.
And yet, perhaps in some way
I can be a hand to hold in the darkness
In some way, try to blunt the sharpness of pain
But if not – it may help a little
Just to know I care.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Naturally general works for Acts of Worship, not forgetting the holy books of various religious faiths have material to help in preparing an occasion on this theme.

A browse round your local bookshop will be rewarded with further material which you can use for this (and other themes)