



Living Life to the Full through our Senses

A Resource for the National Month of Prayer for Christian Toddler Groups

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Background

It is a well-documented fact that the period of human development from the very start of a child's life at conception, through to the first day of nursery school is absolutely critical for laying foundations for the future wellbeing and happiness of that child and eventually that adult. It is also widely recognised that the crucial nurturing role of loving, secure family relationships in these early days, weeks and months of a child's life, is the basis for the infant and growing child's spiritual wellbeing too.

How do we support families with toddlers, both those in our parish community and those on the edges? The presence of a toddler group in the parish is a great way of being in solidarity with families, accompanying them on a pathway of human and spiritual growth. Pre-nursery children come along with their dad or mum or carer or grandparent, and find themselves in a safe and happy place where they feel loved and supported, have fun and play together, tap into their spirituality, and develop a sense of belonging through the experience of this strand of church community life and ministry.

This resource – 'Living life to the full' (Gospel of John, 10.10) 'through our senses'

Some of the National Prayer Month resources and ideas will be specifically for prayer **for** the toddler groups – the families who come, the leaders, the host-community, and the local area. Other resources are for use directly **with** the adults and children in the toddler group, such as this resource, 'Living life to the full through our senses'. Decide on the best time to use it, during the toddler group session, or at home, or with a group of adults and children, weekday morning, afternoon or weekend.

Why are we thinking about and using our 'senses' in this way?

Jesus says 'I have come that everyone would have life, and have it to the full'. This simple five-session resource offers ideas for Toddler groups or family groups to use with young children, helping both the adults and children to explore together what 'living life to the full' means through using our senses. We are our bodies, and we celebrate and live our life to the full in our bodies – this is the way we are made in bodily form, with wonderful gifts and skills and abilities, me and you! We are beautiful and precious to God exactly as we are. And we are precious to one another too. We can wonder about this through play and stories and song and actions. **Have fun!**

Session One: Touch

Living Life to the Full using the sense of touch, mainly through our Hands!

Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

Welcome everyone to the activity. It's good to be here!

Background

Spend a moment simply explaining that this is a special "National Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups", and our activity today is part of this celebratory month of prayer.

Step Two: We Look At Our Experience



We are going to begin this session by looking at our hands! Ask the children to tell you about their hands (shape, fingers, thumb, palm) and all the different ways we use our hands (to say how we are feeling, sad or happy, to communicate our love and care, in practical making and doing skills every day, for work and for play). 'Sign Language' is a way of communicating using signs made by our hands! We particularly use the **sense of touch** through our hands – although we can touch and feel things with others parts of our bodies too of course. Can you make a heart-shape with your hands? How do we show we are happy with our hands? or sad? How do we show being kind with our hands – for example, saying 'you are my friend and I care about you' ?

In our Christian Tradition our bodies and all our 'senses' are very important

The family home, with the people we live with, is a place where we love one another, by being kind and sharing, we learn to say please, thank you and sorry; we think about what other people need, and we use our hearts and hands a lot to help each other! For Christians, Jesus shows us the way, and says he is with us, especially when we show our love. In the bible, we read how Jesus used his hands, first of all as the son of Joseph the carpenter, building and making things from wood. But then as a grown-up, he travelled around, teaching about God's love, and how to live life to the full, and making people well again – often by a touch of his hand. Here is a story:



Step Three: We listen – the Word of God in the Bible

Read the story slowly, pausing after each verse or couple of verses. Ask everyone to listen and see what catches their attention

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 8

One little girl, the daughter of a man called Jairus, was very ill, and her father asked Jesus to come to his house and make his daughter better. When Jesus arrived at the house, he was told that the daughter had died. But Jesus said to Jairus, the father, 'Don't be frightened; just believe, and she will be made well'. He said to everyone else, 'Stop crying – she is not dead, she is asleep'. They laughed at him because they knew she was dead. But he took the little girl by the hand, and said 'My child, get up' and at once she stood up. And her parents were amazed! Jesus told them to give her something to eat! (from Luke 8. 41-42,49-56)

Step Four: We Respond

- I wonder what you noticed in this story? What did you like about it? What did you like best?
 - Jesus often says 'don't be afraid' when something goes wrong or is difficult.
 - **He asks us to be like him!** Kind and strong.
 - And to use our hands and our hearts to help people, whatever they need – a kind word or kind touch to say I love you, or thank-you, or please, or sorry; a helpful job done, a happy wave, a clap to celebrate or just having fun!

Step Five: Activity choices

1. Draw round your hand and decorate the drawing. Perhaps each finger could be coloured for one or two people in your family (mum, dad, granny, auntie, brother, sister, cousin.... you choose). This lovely picture will remind you of all the people you love and who love you – and how you look after each other, sometimes using your sense of TOUCH through your hands!
2. An 'awareness' walk or 'awareness' tray of objects – either outside or inside. Walk around slowly, looking for things to touch/hold and describe. Choose one or two to share later. *Or* the Leader could have a tray or box prepared with things to hold, touch and describe (e.g. stones, shells, wood, variety of leaves/twigs, some pieces of fabric (eg velvet, cotton, wool, satin, elastic). Invite the children to choose.
 - Gather the children.... share together.

- **Questions:** I wonder what that feels like to hold/touch? Is it hard? Rough or smooth? Soft? Hot? Cold? Warm? Light or heavy? I wonder why you like it? Or not? What does it make you think of? What do you think you can do with it?

Step Six: We Pray

Leader: Let's sit quietly for a moment and remember all the things we have **touched**, and what we have shared.... (Gather together some of the children's responses to the 'wondering' questions above – invite everyone to pray: 'Thank you God for the gift of touch, and for everything we touch and use with our hands.....' and allow for anything the children or adults want to say /pray too.

You might finish with everyone holding hands in a circle – 'holding hands helps us feel that we belong, that we have friends and we care about each other'. You may know a signing song using hands to sign! (eg Singing Hands <http://www.singinghands.co.uk> for resources)

Thank you God for everyone here, for the friends we make and the fun we have together. Thank you God for our families, and for all the families in this area. May we reach out with our hands to help each other as best we can. AMEN.

Session Two: SIGHT



Living Life to the Full using the sense of sight, through our eyes!

Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

Welcome everyone to the activity. It's good to be here!

Background

Spend a moment simply reminding everyone that this is a special “National Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups”, and our activity today is part of this celebratory month of prayer.

Step Two: We Look At Our Experience

Today we are looking at our eyes! Our eyes are the way we see everything. Each part of the eye has a job to do. There are parts that protect the eye, and keep it clean, and there are the amazing parts inside the eye that help us see things – colours and shapes and light and shade, our family and friends, our homes – in fact, everything in our beautiful world. First of all, let's have a look at each other's eyes. Take it in turns (or the leader may prefer to have lots of pictures of eyes from magazines or newspapers). What colour are your friend's eyes? What colour are your eyes, do you know? Ask your friend to tell you. How do eyes work? What are they really useful for? What do you like about eyes?

In our Christian Tradition our bodies and all our 'senses' are very important

We often find Jesus in the bible looking and noticing with his eyes – especially when people are on the edge, and other people haven't really noticed them. He also tells lots of stories about seeing things and noticing what is really important, and doing something to help – like when someone is hurt, or sick or sad. Here is one of these stories.

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 13.

One day Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, and a woman was there who had been bent over for eighteen years. She couldn't stand up straight at all! When **Jesus saw her**, he called her forward and said, 'Woman, you are set free from being bent over double' and he put his hands on her, and immediately she was able to stand up straight, and she thanked God! (Luke 13:10-13, from the New International Version, © 1978)

Step Four: We Respond

- I wonder what you noticed in this story? What did you like about it? What did you like best?
- I wonder what was the woman able to see before Jesus came and noticed her? I wonder what difference Jesus made to her life, now she could stand up straight – what could she see now?
- Jesus says it's important to use our eyes and notice who is hurt or sad, or needs our help in any way, and then do something about it!

Step Five: Activity choices

1. First, bend over and touch your toes. What can you see from this position, head and body bent right over? Now, stand up straight, and have a good look around. What can you see – inside? Outside? What is the smallest thing? The biggest thing? What colours can you see? What else can you see with your eyes? For the older children who are learning their sounds and letters, you could play a game if Younger children could perhaps play the game with colours – *I spy with my little eye something that is...* (green, yellow etc...)

- Gather the children '*I Spy with my little eye*share together what you have noticed with your eyes.
- **Questions:** I wonder what's the best thing about being able to see? Who do we see every day? Who helps you, and who do you help?

Step Six: We Pray

Leader: Let's sit quietly for a moment and remember all the things we have noticed with our eyes.

You may know a song about seeing things!

Thank you God for everyone here, for the friends we make and the fun we have together. Thank you God for our sense of SIGHT, and for everything we can see. For all the things and people we notice with our eyes. Thank you God for our families, and for all the families in this area. May we look and notice with our eyes, and really see everyone, sharing love and happiness as best we can. AMEN.

Session Three: HEARING

Living Life to the Full using the sense of hearing, through our ears!

Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

Welcome everyone to the activity. It's good to be here!

Background

Spend a moment simply explaining that this is a special "National Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups", and our activity today is part of this celebratory month of prayer.

Step Two: We Look At Our Experience

We have two ears, and we use them for hearing! First of all, let's have a look at each other's ears (we can't see our own because they are on the sides of our head!). Take it in turns to have a look (or the leader may prefer to have a variety of pictures of ears, from magazines/newspapers). What do you notice about ears? Describe what they are like? How do you think they work? Why have we got two? What do you like to listen to? (voices talking, or singing; stories, music, cars, wind in the trees, waves on the seashore)

In our Christian Tradition our bodies and all our 'senses' are very important

Listening! Lots of people over hundreds and hundreds of years have told us about listening. Listening to learn, to know things, to find out what's going on, listening to stories, listening so we know what to do or say. Throughout the bible, you can find lots of people listening to questions, listening to answers. Jesus himself listens, from when he was a boy growing up, and when he starts doing the work God the Father has asked him to do. He listens to people's hopes and their sadness too. Here is a story:

Step Three: We listen – the Word of God in the Bible

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2

Every year Jesus's parents, Mary & Joseph, went on a journey with all their friends and family to Jerusalem, to celebrate a special feast called The Passover. When Jesus was twelve years old, they all went up to this great feast, and when it was over, they were returning home in the crowd of friends – but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents realising. They thought he was with friends, travelling with them in the crowd. But after a day, they began looking for him amongst their relatives and friends and when they didn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days, they found him in the Temple, **sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.** Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. His poor mum and dad were amazed too. They had been worried. He went back to Nazareth with them. And he grew very wise!

(Excerpts from The New International Version © New York International Bible Society 1979)



- I wonder what you noticed in this story? What did you like about it? What did you like best?
- Who do you like to listen to? I wonder why?

Step Five: Activity choices

1. Leader might like to play some different kinds of music (on an iPod or phone perhaps) – soft, loud, fast, slow. Invite the children to move to the music. What does that piece of music make you think of? What is it like? Which is your favourite piece of music? What do you like about it?

2. What about animal noises. What noise does a.... (dog, cat, cow, sheep, chicken, horse, lion, frog, bee etc) make? Take it in turns for the different noises. What about... a (car, tractor, bus, train, fire-engine, aeroplane, Hoover etc) What is your very SOFTEST voice? and what about your LOUDEST voice?

- Gather the children....share together.
- **Questions:** I wonder when it's absolutely quiet, and no-one is talking, what can you hear? What is it like to be very, very quiet? Invite the children to close their eyes and just sit very quietly for two minutes (time it). Did you like that? What did it feel like? I wonder, what did you hear?

Step Six: We Pray

Leader: Let's sit quietly for a moment and remember all the things we have listened too!

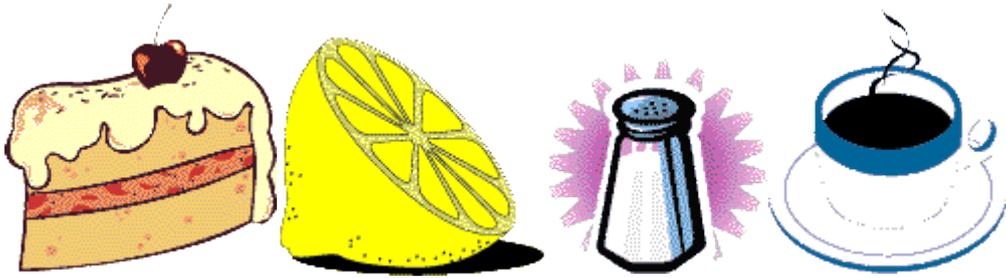
God speaks to us when we are very quiet and still, sometimes without using words at all. He is very close to us and loves us very much. He almost whispers 'I love you very much'!

Thank you God for the sound of(let the children respond). Thank you God for all the sounds we hear. Help us to be good listeners! Amen.

You may know a signing song about listening or hearing, using hands to sign! (e.g. Singing Hands <http://www.singinghands.co.uk> for ideas, resources or choose one you know.)

Thank you God for everyone here, for the friends we make and the fun we have together. Thank you God for our families, and for all the families in this area. May we listen with our ears, and help each other as best we can. AMEN.

Session Four: TASTE



Living Life to the Full using the sense of taste, through our mouths!

Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

Welcome everyone to the activity. It's good to be here!

Background

Spend a moment simply explaining that this is a special “National Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups”, and our activity today is part of this celebratory month of prayer.

Step Two: We Look At Our Experience

Our tongues help us taste different flavours – sweet, sour, salty, bitter – using thousands of little ‘taste buds’ on the surface on our tongues that send messages to our brains. This is our sense of TASTE! When I am eating something sweet, the message goes to the brain ‘ This is something sweet!’ Or sour... or salty... or bitter. (By the way, the tongue also helps us chew, moving the food round the mouth, and helps us swallow . It helps us speak too!)

Let's think about the foods we really love! What do you really like to eat? What is the most delicious, tasty food you have ever eaten? Is it sweet? Or does it have a savoury flavour? Does it taste salty? or Sour? or Bitter? What is your favourite fruit? And vegetable? What colours are they? Do you know where these fruits or vegetables come from – where they grow? Or how your favourite food is made? What is your favourite meal?

In our Christian Tradition our bodies and all our ‘senses’ are very important

You hear a lot about food and meals in the bible. Jesus loves meals, and a lot of his stories happen at meal times, or are about meals or picnics. He loves to celebrate happy events, like a wedding, (probably birthdays too!) – with special food and drink. All sorts of people came to these parties. Jesus did not want anyone to feel left out. He wants people to enjoy themselves together – and sitting round a table having a lovely meal is a great place to chat about our day, or about the things we love to see and do, or even our hopes and dreams when we grow up! Here is a story:

Step Three: We listen – the Word of God in the Bible

Read the story slowly, pausing after each verse or couple of verses. Ask everyone to listen and see what catches their attention

From the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 14

Crowds of people had followed people, and were listening to him teaching and making sick people better. As the evening came, his friends said to him: This is a far-away place, and it's getting late. Send the crowds away so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food. Jesus said, 'They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat'. But the disciples said, we only have five loaves of bread and two fish! 'Bring them here to me' Jesus said. And he told the people to sit down on the grass. And he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said Thank you, and broke the loaves, and gave it all to the disciples to share with the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and there were even some scraps of food left over!

(Excerpts from The New International Version © New York International Bible Society 1979)

- I wonder what you noticed in this story? What did you like about it? What did you like best?
- Jesus makes sure there is enough for everyone to eat – even when it looks like there isn't going to be enough! I wonder what it was like to sit on the grass and share a tasty big picnic like that? Have you ever been to a big picnic, or had a special family meal? What did you like best about that? Sometimes I think food tastes better when you eat it with other people... What do you think?

Step Five: Activity choices

1. Gather together lots of pictures of different food and drink from all over the world (from magazines/papers/internet). Ask the children to choose a picture, and say why they like that picture and tell us about it. Do you like that particular food? Do you know where it comes from? Have you ever helped make a meal or picnic at home? What was that like?

2. Find an easy children's recipe for cornflake/rice-crispie crunchies – no cooking required! If you have an oven facility in the toddler group, or wherever you are meeting, you might like to get packets of pizza dough, to mix and roll out in small circles. Provide a simple tomato paste and topping, bake and eat! Or, if the above is too difficult given the numbers, make up a big batch of playdough and invite the children and adults to work in small groups and make a favourite meal together!

3. Invite the families to bring in cakes, make a small donation to buy one another's cakes. The money raised could go towards a charity or food-bank that helps people who don't get enough food to eat each day. Families might also be invited to bring foods for the foodbank collection if you have one locally. e.g. see <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/> to give the Toddler group some information about hungry people in our country too and how we can help.

- Gather the children....share together.
- **Questions:** I wonder how you got on with your activity? What did you like best? What do you think about having good tasty food each day? And if you didn't get it? We all need proper, tasty food!

Step Six: We Pray

Leader: Let's sit quietly for a moment and remember all the lovely food we have looked at and talked about, and the things we have made.

Thank you God for all the food we eat each day, helping us grow strong and healthy. Thank you for everyone who helps to make our food. For farmers and factory workers, cooks and people who work in shops. And for those who make our meals at home too. Help us to remember those who don't have enough food, and to be generous and share in whatever way we can.

You may know a signing song or a song about food!

Thank you God for everyone here, for the friends we make and the fun we have together. Thank you God for our families, and for all the families in this area. May we reach out and share what we have with others as best we can. AMEN.

Session Five: SMELL

Living Life to the Full using the sense of smell, through our noses!

Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

Welcome everyone to the activity. It's good to be here!

Background

Spend a moment simply explaining that this is a special "National Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups", and our activity today is part of this celebratory month of prayer.

Step Two: We Look At Our Experience

We use our noses to smell! Let's have a look at our noses. What do you notice? There are two holes, called 'nostrils'. Noses are for breathing and for smelling – and sneezing!

Keep still for a minute – close your mouth – and think about breathing through your nose, in, and out... what does that feel like?

What smells do you really like? Why do you like that smell? What about smells you don't like? Show the children some hand-cream. Let them smell it and have a little squeeze on their hands if they like.

In our Christian Tradition our bodies and all our 'senses' are very important

In several books in the Bible, you can read about lovely food that smells really good, or special cream or 'ointment' that is rubbed on the body and smells really lovely! Kings were anointed with special smelling oil as a sign of being a King! So were the leaders in the communities. To have a special 'anointing' with a perfumed cream or ointment was a sign of honour and respect. At Baptism (Christening) when babies and grown-ups are welcomed into the Christian church, during the ceremony they have a small 'dab' of special cream put on their heads and chests as a sign of being made strong in Jesus. When people are sick, or have died, they have this 'anointing' too. It is a sign of respect for the body – this is the body of a human person, loved, precious, special. Here is a story about Jesus:



Step Three: We listen – the Word of God in the Bible

Read the story slowly, pausing after each verse or couple of verses. Ask everyone to listen and see what catches their attention

From the Gospel of St John, Chapter 12

Jesus arrived at Bethany, where his friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived. They gave a special dinner for him in his honour. Martha served the meal. Lazarus and Jesus sat at the table with the others. Mary took a huge pot of very expensive perfume, called 'nard'. She poured it on Jesus's feet! And the house was filled with the lovely smell of this perfume. Everyone could smell it! She has done a lovely thing for Jesus.

(Excerpts from The New International Version © New York International Bible Society 1979)

Step Four: We Respond

- I wonder what you noticed in this story? What did you like about it? What did you like best? I wonder what Jesus liked about the perfume? How did it make him feel? Mary poured on the perfume, and the smell would be a sign to Jesus and everyone there that Jesus was loved and special, and maybe, like a sportsman, who uses oil to keep his muscles strong, this special cream helped Jesus feel strong too.

Step Five: Activity

In advance, gather some small containers with lids, and things to smell. (e.g. lemon peel or juice, orange peel; herbs - mint, rosemary, sage; lavender; pine needles, cotton wool soaked in any liquid, like coffee, perfume, vanilla extract, vinegar; a clove of garlic, root ginger, flower petals.) Place the things to smell, one in each pot, and make a small hole in the lid to smell through. (You could use yoghurt pots, and silver foil for the lid, stuck on with sellotape or an elastic band – fixed after you have put the thing to smell inside of course!)

Invite the children to take turns to put on a blindfold (or with yoghurt pots you won't need the blindfold because you can't see through the pots – but it can be more fun with it). Try and guess what one or two smells are.

- Gather the children....share together.
- **Questions:** I wonder what it was like to smell the smells with a blindfold on? What different smells did you smell? Which did you like the best? Which did you not like! What smells do you like at home?

Step Six: We Pray

Leader: Let's sit quietly for a moment and remember all the things we have smelled, and how wonderful our sense of smell is.

Dear God, I really like the smell of..... Thank you God for our noses, that help us breathe and sneeze, and most of all, for the sense of smell!

You may know a signing song to sign with hands, or another song about smells!

Thank you God for everyone here, for the friends we make and the fun we have together. Thank you God for our families, and for all the families in this area. May we reach out with our hands to help each other as best we can. AMEN.

We hope you enjoy this resource. Please look at www.1277.org.uk for other ideas and resources for use, especially during the Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups in June.