

A photograph of a smiling woman with dark curly hair, wearing a yellow shirt, hugging a young child with blonde hair from behind. The child is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. They are in a room with a black dressmaker's mannequin in the background. The bottom half of the image has a red background with white text and a star logo.

Everyone's welcome

*Action for
Children*

A special worship service in
support of Action for Children

Driven by love...

We pray for vulnerable children.

We give to support vulnerable children.

And we campaign for the lasting change needed to create more safe and happy childhoods.

Driven by love, we take action for children.

Dear friends,

Thank you again for your ongoing support for Action for Children. Many of you have supported us faithfully for years – decades even – and we treasure each relationship. We are so thankful for you, your prayers, and your fundraising work and donations. You're helping us to change the lives of so many vulnerable children and young people.

This year's Action for Children Sunday is 12 July, though you can hold your service whenever works for you. Our theme is 'Everyone's welcome' – a reference to the wider family of God and in particular our focus on foster care, which is where Action for Children began over 150 years ago.

Sadly, the need is as great as ever, with 7,000 new foster families needed. But your support means we can welcome children and young people into foster families and the communities around them. Fostering can be the turning point in a child or young person's life. It's more than just a home – it's stability, hope and a loving environment. It's someone they can trust saying, "It's ok, I'm here", when their world is full of unknowns, and giving them the opportunity to thrive. Your support helps our foster carers to do this. Thank you.

This booklet provides you with lots of resources to plan your special Action for Children Sunday service. Use it however you like, either 'out of the box' as it is, or by mixing and matching the sermon ideas, hymns, and activities with your own creativity to create a service that suits your church's needs. Whatever your service looks like, we hope you'll have a wonderful time praising God and talking about how we can welcome everyone, including children, as he welcomes us into his family.

As always, we appreciate your prayers and feedback – we love to hear from you. Thank you and God bless you for all you do to support Action for Children.



Karis Kolawole

Faith Partnerships Lead

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The essentials

Planning your Action for Children Sunday service

We hope this booklet will help you to plan a special worship service in support of Action for Children. You can use it on Action for Children Sunday – the second Sunday in July – or at any other time or event. Please feel free to choose different hymns, prayers and activities, or to adjust the format.

Your Relationship Fundraising Executive can help you with your planning, and can send you lots of useful fundraising materials, including:

– Gift Aid envelopes.

– Posters.

– Leaflets.



You can find their details on the contact sheet included with this mailing. You can download extra copies of this booklet and PowerPoint slides at actionforchildren.uk/faithFR

A great way to bring our work to life is to invite one of our friendly speakers to talk at your church. Get in touch with your Relationship Fundraising Executive to find out more. Alternatively, we have a fantastic new video for our Methodist and church supporters to use to bring an inspiring message on occasions when a speaker isn't available. The Revd Helen Cameron, former President of the Methodist Conference, talks about our work and the difference we're making together. Christopher, one of the young people we've helped, also tells his incredible story. You can watch the video at actionforchildren.uk/faithFR

Send us your feedback

We would love to hear your thoughts on these materials, or any suggestions you may have for future services. Please feel free to get in touch with Karis with your feedback.



All-age service outline

Being mindful of your audience

If you have adoptive or foster families in your congregation, they might appreciate knowing in advance that this topic will be coming up, so they can be prepared.

Theme: Everyone's welcome

Bible reading: Mark 9:30–37

This worship outline offers choices at various points. You can use each part individually, or put them together to create your own worship design. See page 15 for hymn and song suggestions.

Overview

God invites all of us to be a part of his family, to call him Father, and to think of each other as brothers and sisters. The Bible also encourages us to care for people who are vulnerable because they don't have family able to care for them. This Action for Children Sunday, we're thinking about foster care, those who need care, and people who open their hearts and homes to extend that welcome to children and young people.

Gather

Introduction to worship

You will need: a large bag.

Ask for six to eight volunteers from different places in the congregation to take off a shoe. Try to pick people to represent the full range of demographic groups in your church. Take the bag to them each in turn so they can place their shoe in the bag without it being seen by lots of people. Take the shoes to the front, remove them from the bag and place them where they can all be seen.

Then find the same number of volunteers (perhaps from among the children and young people) to come forward, take a shoe from the collection, and search for its owner. They should find out three facts from the owner: their name, their shoe size, and their favourite childhood toy, and report those back to the congregation. They can then return the shoes to their owners.

You could then explain: We've seen that we all have different shoe sizes, and our shoes look different. Some are super-smart

and shiny, some are faithful and comfortable old friends! Those shoes have been to all kinds of different places with us. But they all do the same job of looking after our feet, and they are all members of the shoe family. We are a family made of people who have lots of different experiences. And like a comfy shoe makes our foot feel secure, warm and protected when we walk outside, our church family should make all of us – including our visitors – feel safe, welcome and cared for, both when we meet together and throughout the week.

The Bible story we're thinking about today has a similar theme.

Call to worship

Let's join together as the family of God, to celebrate his love for us and learn more about sharing it with others.

A gathering prayer

Father God,
fill us with your peace and
joy as we celebrate the depth
of your love for us,
and fill us with compassion and love
as we consider how we can respond
to those in need around us.
Open our ears, our minds and our
hearts to hear your voice today and
to be guided by you about how we
celebrate and share your welcome
with our community.

Amen.

Share the Word

Present the Gospel

Mark 9:30–37

You will need: nine to 13 adult volunteer actors, one child volunteer actor, a semicircle of chairs for everyone except the child.

A role play acted by members of the congregation.

We join Jesus and the disciples as they finish a long walk and arrive at a home in Capernaum. Jesus is in one group, while another group is bickering.

Disciple 1: No, I think you'll find that I'm more important. He gave me a special nickname!

Disciple 2: Well, how many of us did he take up the mountain? Hmm? I don't remember seeing you there!

Disciple 3: I think you'll find he's had a chat with my mum and promised me the seat next to him in heaven. Go on, beat that!

Disciple 4: Shh! He'll hear you!

They enter the house, and as they're taking off their shoes...

Jesus: *(to the group who were bickering)* So... what was that you were arguing about on the road? Is there something I can help you with?

Disciples 1–3: (*mumbling, embarrassed, talking over each other*)
Erm, nothing, teacher / Nothing, my Lord / No, nothing to worry about.

Disciple 4: (*hurriedly trying to change the subject*) Would anyone like a cup of tea?

They sit down on the chairs, with Jesus in the centre of the group. He gives them a gentle but knowing look.

Jesus: (*gently*) Hey – I can help, you know. Listen: if you want to be the first, you have to be the last – the person who serves everyone else. That's what's important in God's eyes.

As he says this, a young boy joins them. He is holding a bowl (for them to wash their feet) but Jesus takes the bowl from him, puts it aside, and sits the boy beside him.

Jesus: This boy might not be strong and 'useful' to you yet, but every single child is valuable and important to God, just the way they are. Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And they don't only welcome me, but my Father God who sent me, as well.

The disciples look astonished as they all wander off, with Jesus looking after the child and carrying the bowl.

Jesus: (*to the boy as they walk off*) Come on, I'll wash your feet first, and then you can eat with us.

Two sermon ideas

Sermon one

Today's Bible reading begins with Jesus and his disciples walking along the road. Jesus is talking about something very serious. He tells them that he is going to suffer, that he will be killed, and that he will rise again. It's one of the most important things he ever says.

But the disciples don't really understand. And instead of asking Jesus what he means, they start arguing with one another. They argue about who is the greatest.

When they arrive at the house, Jesus asks them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" They're quiet, because they know their argument doesn't look very good in the light of what Jesus has just said.

So Jesus sits down and teaches them. He says, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the last one of all and the servant of everyone." In other words, greatness in God's kingdom doesn't look like winning, being in charge, or being the most important person in the room. God's kind of greatness looks like serving.

Then Jesus does something very surprising. He takes a child and places the child right in the middle of everyone. He puts his arms around the child and says, "Whoever welcomes a child like this in my name, welcomes me. And whoever

welcomes me welcomes not just me, but the Father who sent me.”

Now, to us, that might sound lovely but not very shocking. We’re used to children being valued and protected. But in Jesus’ time, children had no power, no status, and very little voice. They couldn’t earn money. They couldn’t repay kindness. Most people hardly noticed them at all. (It was similar when Action for Children first started as National Children’s Home, too.)

And yet Jesus places a child right at the centre and says, “This is what my kingdom looks like.”

Jesus doesn’t say, “Welcome the most impressive.”

He doesn’t say, “Welcome the strongest or the cleverest.”

He says, “Welcome the child.”

And he goes even further. He says that when we welcome a child like this, we are actually welcoming him. And when we welcome him, we are welcoming God.

That tells us something very important about the heart of God. God pays close attention to children. Especially children who are vulnerable. Children who are overlooked. Children who need safety, care, and love.

Around us, there are children who, for many reasons, cannot live safely with their birth families. Some need

foster carers. Some live in children’s homes. Without the safety and security of a loving home, the world can feel terrifying for these children.

Action for Children works every day with these children and young people. They support foster carers, run children’s homes, and walk alongside families who are struggling. Their work is one way that Jesus’ words are lived out today, by welcoming children who need extra care and putting them somewhere safe.

Not everyone here will be called to foster a child. That’s important to say. But Jesus does not limit his words to one group of people. He speaks to all his followers.

Welcoming children can look like many things:

- Supporting foster carers and children through prayer and friendship.
- Giving time, skills, or resources.
- Creating a church where children feel safe, known, and valued.
- And supporting charities like Action for Children who do this work every day.

In God’s kingdom, greatness is not measured by how many people serve us, but by how willing we are to serve others – especially those who cannot give anything back.

So today, as we think about children, foster carers, and the work of Action for Children, let's remember this picture: Jesus, standing with his disciples, a child in his arms, saying, "This one matters. And when you welcome them, you welcome me."

Sermon two

Imagine for a moment that you're the child in today's Bible story.

You haven't said anything. You're just there, standing near a group of adults. They're talking quite seriously, maybe even arguing. You don't really understand what they're saying, but you can tell it's important to them. They're talking about who is the greatest.

Then something unexpected happens. Jesus notices you.

He calls you over. He brings you right into the middle of the room, where everyone can see you. And then he puts his arms around you.

Jesus doesn't ask you a question. He doesn't test you. He doesn't tell you to behave better or try harder. He simply holds you and says to the grown-ups, "Whoever welcomes a child like this welcomes me."

If you were that child, what would you hear in those words?

You might hear Jesus saying, "You are not invisible."

"You are not in the way."

"You are not too small to matter."

"You belong here."

Before the child becomes an example for the disciples, the child is first a person: noticed, welcomed, and loved by Jesus.

This moment happens just after the disciples have been arguing about who is the most important. Jesus doesn't respond by choosing the strongest disciple, or the cleverest one, or the best speaker. He chooses a child: someone with no power, no status, and no voice in the argument at all.

Jesus places the child at the centre and says, "This is what my kingdom looks like."

That tells us something very important about God. God's love is not just for the confident or the successful. God pays special attention to those who feel small, uncertain, or overlooked – especially children.

For many children today, those feelings are very real. Some children cannot live safely with their birth families. Some move between homes. Some carry worries, losses, and fears that are far too heavy for a child to carry. They may feel unwanted, unsettled, or unsure where they belong.

In those situations, the message "You belong here" matters more than we might ever realise.

That's why foster care and children's homes exist – as a response of care when children need safety and stability. And that's where Action for Children does such important work. They support foster carers, run children's homes, and walk alongside children and families during very difficult times. Through their work, children are given not just a roof over their heads, but the chance to feel seen, protected, and valued.

When we support work like this, we are helping to echo the welcome of Jesus.

Not everyone here will foster a child. Jesus doesn't say that everyone has to do the same thing. But he does say that welcoming children is part of welcoming him.

That welcome can take many forms:

- Praying for children and young people in care.
- Supporting foster families and organisations like Action for Children.
- Being a church where children are listened to and taken seriously.
- And creating spaces where children feel safe and know they belong.

This message is not just for adults. Children and young people also have a role. Jesus shows us that children are not just receivers of

God's love, they are signs of God's kingdom. Your presence matters. Your voice matters. You belong here too.

So let's return to that picture: Jesus, standing with his disciples, holding a child and saying, "When you welcome this child, you welcome me."

May we be a church that helps children hear those words, not just once, but again and again:

"You are seen."

"You are safe."

"You belong here."

Amen.

Offering for Action for Children's work

An introduction to the offering

At the start of the service, we matched people to their shoes and talked about how our shoes are all different, just like we are. Now I'd like you to imagine what it's like to be in the shoes of a child who is going into care. Many of them will have already suffered unimaginable trauma. Neglect. Abuse. The loss of a parent. It's devastating. Without the safety and security of a loving home, the world can feel terrifying for these children.

What part might we be able to play in supporting a child like that? Maybe you'll be called to find

out more about fostering a child. Perhaps you could befriend a foster family and support them in practical ways. You could donate to Action for Children. And we can all pray for the work they do to make children feel welcome. We're going to hear more about Action for Children, and then there'll be a time of prayer and the opportunity to donate if you are able. As you listen, please be thinking about how you could respond.

Talk or video about Action for Children's work

If you have invited a guest speaker from Action for Children, they could give their talk at this point. Alternatively, someone could read the stories on pages 16 and 23 about people Action for Children has supported, or watch a video from Action for Children, such as Brad Kella's story at youtu.be/wghUiYjEnY. You can read the information below after the video, to prepare for the time of reflection and prayer.

Wording to use after the video

Every 15 minutes, a child goes into care in the UK. They've often already faced huge challenges in their young lives. Over half will have suffered neglect and abuse. Many will have experienced trauma.

Action for Children is there whenever a child needs them – to celebrate exam results, cheer them on in their first swimming lesson, or have a reassuring chat at the end of a tough school day. We know little things can have a life-long impact. It's not much. It should be a given. Especially when a child has felt more trauma than comfort.

Fostering a child or young person can be the turning point in their life. It's more than just giving them a home – it's being there when they need you and offering stability, hope and a loving environment. It's saying, "It's ok, I'm here", when their world is full of unknowns, and giving them the opportunity to thrive. We make sure our foster carers have the resources, training and skills they need for whatever they may face. And we build strong and lasting relationships, working as a team around the child to make decisions together. We know this makes the difference to the families we work with.

We see every day how fostering enriches the lives of carers, as well as children and young people. It can work flexibly around your life, and you can build a community with other foster carers. We work hard to find the right fit so that everyone in the family feels fulfilled, safe and happy.

Simply put, we help create the feeling of family. We know fostering can make a lasting difference to the lives of children who need a safe and loving home, and to the families who provide them.

Right now, there's a shortage of foster carers across the UK. There simply aren't enough for the number of children and young people who need them. So, if you've ever thought about fostering, please visit

actionforchildren.org.uk/fostering

Pray and donate to Action for Children

Provide everyone with paper and pens or pencils. Ask them to write (or draw) a prayer for children in care, foster carers, people considering foster care, or those supporting them. After a few minutes, collect up all the prayers along with any money they would like to donate to Action for Children.

Alternatively, you could use the following prayer and collect donations at the end of the service.

Father God,

Thank you that we belong in your family, and you welcome us in and show us your love. We pray for children in care, that they would know this deep sense of being welcome, lived out every day by the people who look after them.

We pray for foster carers and the staff in children's homes, that you would fill them with all the love, energy and grace they need to be the carers that these children need them to be. Thank you for their dedication, patience, and love.

(If appropriate, with permission, pray for any foster families in your congregation.)

We pray for all the people who surround foster families with support, whether they are professionals, family members or friends, that you would give them wisdom, grace, and steadfastness to support in the ways that are needed. We ask that you would help them to be quick to listen and slow to judge.

Please give guidance and clarity of thought to all those who might consider becoming foster carers, that they would make the right decisions. Be with them on their journey and surround them with people to support and encourage them.

And please help us all to be welcoming of others, in all sorts of ways, just as you welcome us.

Amen.

Explore and respond

A choice of active ideas to explore the theme

Helping hands

You will need: paper, pens.

Everyone has a piece of paper and a pen or pencil and draws around their hand (you can photocopy the hand outline on page 27 if you prefer). They then write on each finger (or draw on the palm) some ways hands can help and welcome people. Encourage everyone to pray as they do this activity that God would lead them in the way(s) he would like them to help others.

Welcome tree

You will need: a tree branch planted in a pot with some prepared 'question leaves', blank leaf shapes (see page 26), pens, string, sticky tape, scissors.

Prepare the tree by writing questions on some leaves like:

- What does a welcome look like?
- How can we welcome those on the margins?
- What does the Bible say about being welcomed?
- How can we welcome someone this week?
- What does it mean to be welcomed?

- Which examples can you remember of Jesus welcoming people?

Hang these 'question leaves' on the tree using the string.

Everyone gets into small, mixed-age groups and takes a 'question leaf' from the welcome tree. They talk about the question, and write answers and prayers on blank leaves. They then hang all these leaves on the tree. This can be repeated with another 'question leaf' as time allows. Encourage everyone to return to the welcome tree and read other groups' questions and answers after the service.

Welcome wall

You will need: a large canvas or paper roll, coloured paints, paintbrushes, pens, hand-washing facilities.

Everyone has the opportunity to contribute to a welcome wall of handprints in lots of different colours, representing someone they want to welcome or feel welcomed by. As well as the painted handprints, people can write or draw their prayers for children in care, foster families and Action for Children's homes. You could read some of these aloud when it is complete.

Footsteps of welcome

You will need: photocopied footprints (see page 28), pens, scissors, teddy bear.

Put the teddy bear on a chair in the centre of the congregation. Give everyone a footprint and a pen, and ask them to write a welcome message (or draw something welcoming), a prayer, or a Bible verse of encouragement. They can then cut it out and make a trail of welcoming footprints from the door of the church to the chair.

Closing prayer

Father God,
Thank you that you have chosen to make us all a part of your family, and that we are invited to call you Father. No matter where we have come from or what our life experiences have been, we now belong to you and are known and loved. Help us not to take that privilege for granted, but to share that welcome with others.
In the name of Jesus, who demonstrated your welcome to us.
Amen.

Action for Children would love to see pictures of your prayers and prayer activities. Send them to **karis.kolawole@actionforchildren.org.uk**

How you can take action for children

-  Take part in one of our fundraising events or create one for your local church community: **actionforchildren.uk/faithFR**
-  Join us, take a stand and raise your voice for safe and happy childhoods. Sign up to hear about Action for Children's policy campaigns: **actionforchildren.uk/CampaignSignUp**
-  Find out about the impact of poverty on children in your area using our digital tool: **take.actionforchildren.org.uk/page/112864/action/1?ea.tracking.id=fth**
-  Find out more about fostering with us. Visit: **actionforchildren.org.uk/fostering/fostering-faqs/**
-  Order a free pack to find out how to leave a gift in your will that could help transform a child's life: **actionforchildren.uk/enquirypack-faith**

Hymn suggestions



- ★ **Adoption song**
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7220808
youtu.be/09jKFvCG2Nk
- ★ **Adoption story (Thank you, Jesus)**
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7066255
- ★ **Come people of the risen king** (MP 1267/SoF 2249)
songselect.ccli.com/songs/5232617
- ★ **Compassion hymn** (SoF 2560)
songselect.ccli.com/songs/5468807
- ★ **Everybody's welcome**
songselect.ccli.com/songs/5338281
- ★ **Father of the fatherless** (MP 906/SoF 950)
songselect.ccli.com/songs/1115429
grahamkendrick.co.uk/father-me-o-father-of-the-fatherless
- ★ **God of justice** (MP 1174/SoF 1794)
songselect.ccli.com/songs/4447128
- ★ **Hear the call of the kingdom** (MP 1282/SoF 1819)
songselect.ccli.com/songs/4930752
- ★ **Home in the Family of God**
open.spotify.com/track/3jri885KqJaGURGmka2jYc
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7244165
- ★ **When love takes you in**
songselect.ccli.com/songs/3458383
youtu.be/beZ5hF-qZDY
- ★ **Where there's no song for the silent** (SoF 2648)
- ★ **Who breaks the power** (MP 1373/SoF 3545)
songselect.ccli.com/songs/6333821
- ★ **Who you say I am**
songselect.ccli.com/songs/7102401
youtu.be/lKw6uqtGFfo
- ★ **You have shown us** (SoF 2679)
songselect.ccli.com/songs/5272914
youtu.be/k4wm8Z-y8P8

Colin and Marie's story

Colin and Marie have been fostering with Action for Children for 14 years. In that time, they have cared for many children and young people. They talk to us about what a typical day looks like for them.



Colin and Marie have always strived to help young people. For the past 20 years, they've run a church youth group. They formed strong bonds with the children who attended. Some even joked about the couple fostering them. So, when Colin and Marie saw an advert for foster carers in the church magazine, it seemed like it was meant to be. Colin says,

"That was it, we decided we would give it a try. Here we are now, 14 years later."

Colin and Marie are long-term foster carers. They have a 14-year-old and a nine-year-old living with them. An average day for the household starts at 7.30am. Once everyone is up, they have breakfast as a family. After dropping the children to school, they take their dog for a walk. They then catch up on chores before it's time to return for school pick-ups.

Schoolwork plays a significant part of Colin and Marie's day. One of their children needs a bit more support with their studies. Marie says,

"When he first came to us, he found school extremely difficult. We've worked with him and he's now top of his spelling group and maths group, and his English is improving."

Training is an important part of supporting and developing foster carers, and takes place once a month while the children are at school. Colin says,

“We go to Action for Children’s head office for training. All the foster carers are there so you get to meet up, swap stories and have a good laugh.”

The couple believe in making time during the day to talk to the young people in their care. Colin says:

“They open up to you more when they’re in the car. We’ve found this is one of the best places for them to talk about what’s happened to them in the past. When they open up, you understand them more.”

The heart of the family’s day is dinner time. It’s an opportunity to catch up. Colin says,

“Dinner happens about 5.30pm. We always sit down together and talk about what sort of day the children had. We also chat about what we have planned for the weekend, and what Friday treats they’ll get if they do well in school.”

Marie adds,

“It’s just normal family time.”

The day comes to an end around 9pm, when the children go to bed. When summing up an average day for a foster carer, Colin says,

“Our daily routine is typical for most people.”

Marie concludes,

“It’s all about family.”

Colin and Marie are an example of the amazing difference our foster carers make in the lives of children and young people. If you’d like to find out more about fostering, visit actionforchildren.org.uk/fostering/get-in-touch and we’ll get back to you.

Children and young people's outline

Theme: **Everyone's welcome**

Bible reading: Mark 9:30–37

Jesus and his disciples were on a long walk (probably about 40 miles) down from a mountain, through Galilee, to Capernaum. Jesus was teaching them on the way, but the disciples had started to argue among themselves.

³³ They came to Capernaum, and after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you arguing about on the road?”

³⁴ But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all.”

³⁶ Then he took a child and had him stand in front of them. He put his arms around him and said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me.”



Passage summary

Of course, Jesus knew what the disciples had been arguing about. He only asked the question because he wanted the disciples to tell him themselves that they were deciding which of them was most important. But when they didn't tell him, he showed them a picture of what it means to be important in God's family. He brought a young boy from the crowd and showed him that he was welcome. The boy wouldn't have looked very important to the disciples, but Jesus said that treating people like him kindly, would be as if they were doing those things for God. When we are kind to people who don't seem important by traditional measures, God sees it as if we are doing those things for him. That makes it very important!

Prepare

Inside-out crown

You will need: cardboard, scissors, pens, jewel or star stickers to decorate (optional), sticky tape.

The children make a cardboard crown for themselves. On the outside, they write words the world uses for greatness

(famous, rich, powerful). On the inside, they write Jesus' words ("Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all.") or draw actions that show kindness (helping, listening, sharing). Spend some time talking about what God values and how that is different from the world around us.

Gather

What makes us feel welcome?

You will need: a whiteboard and pen, or large sheet of paper and sticky notes and pens.

Draw a child on the whiteboard or paper, and invite the children to think of things that make them feel welcome in a new place (someone else's home, a new classroom, at church, etc.) Write these things around the picture or on sticky notes that can be attached to the picture. Are these things only adults can do, or are some of them things they can do to make new people feel welcome?

Share the word

★ Jesus sees me

You will need: a small mirror for each child, cardboard frames, glue, pens.

Each child is given a mirror with a cardboard frame. They decorate the frame with words such as 'loved', 'seen', 'valuable' and 'important' as a reminder they are seen and valued by God. You could talk about how it feels to look in the mirror and see themselves with these labels around them, and to understand these are God's feelings about us.

Explore and respond

★ Build a safe home

You will need: blocks, Lego, or recycled cardboard boxes.

Children use the Lego, blocks, or boxes to build their idea of a 'safe home'. Ask them what makes a home feel safe (e.g. love, food, kindness, listening). Talk about how everyone needs a safe place where they belong, and how we can help our friends and those who might need a friend to feel that they belong. What ideas do they have about being welcoming and helping others to feel safe?

★ Prayer circle

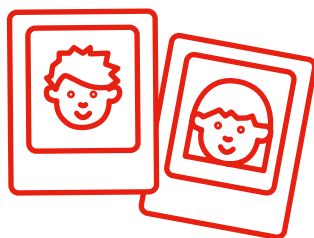
You will need: a battery-powered candle.

Sit in a circle and turn the candle on. Pray short prayers for children who need care, families, and helpers like foster carers and Action for Children support staff and volunteers. What kinds of help do the children think these people might need?

★ Who is welcome?

You will need: pictures of children of different ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

Show the pictures of different children, and ask: are they welcome in God's family? (The answer is always yes.) Spend some time discussing how important it is that no-one is left out, why this is, and how we can be inclusive in our everyday lives. You could also talk about looking out for people who might feel left out at school or other activities and some ideas of things to say to encourage them.



★ Kindness chain

You will need: strips of paper, glue or sticky tape, pens.

Each child writes or draws one act of kindness on a paper strip. Link them into a paper chain and hang it up. Talk together about how small acts of welcome build something big. What small act of welcome could each person do this week? How might the other person feel about that action?

★ You belong here

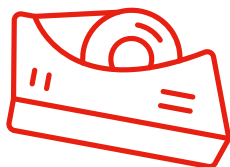
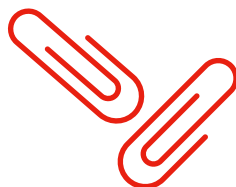
You will need: cardboard, coloured pens.

Children decorate cardboard signs with phrases like 'You belong here', 'God loves you', or 'Everyone's welcome'. These signs can then be displayed inside or outside the church as a message for the community. Discuss how God's family is a place of welcome and all the things we can do to make new people feel at home with us. You could talk about the importance of both showing and telling someone they are welcome.

★ Being last to be first

You will need: paper, pens, paperclips.

Children create a small booklet of 'service coupons' (redeemable for help with homework, tidying up, encouraging words), which they can give to someone at home, church or at school (with their teachers' permission). Discuss how helping others is a great way to show that they care for them. How do others help them in a typical week? What might be an appropriate way to reciprocate and/or thank them?



Song suggestions

Big family of God

songselect.ccli.com/songs/5100093

Everybody's welcome

songselect.ccli.com/songs/5338281

youtu.be/xeV8qoYtDbc

Give it away

songselect.ccli.com/songs/7119546

youtu.be/ywCiDhbD-Js

Great big God

songselect.ccli.com/songs/3373437

youtu.be/qGhgBAKXD9M

I will sing your praises

SoF 92

songselect.ccli.com/songs/58202

Your love for me

songselect.ccli.com/songs/6545963

youtu.be/Wr_7kYuWXbM

You're welcome here

songselect.ccli.com/songs/7245243

youtu.be/CKAjuPnykMw



Michael's story

Michael found family, acceptance, and a sense of confidence and purpose through the support of Action for Children's Amaryllis service.

Michael, now aged 21, experienced an abusive and traumatic childhood. Sadly, sometimes foster placements break down, and when this happened to Michael, he found himself sleeping on a friend's sofa. When he was asked to leave, Michael knew he had nowhere else to go, and became homeless. These experiences deeply affected his mental health. Michael had also faced bullying at school and college for being different, which added to his sense of isolation. He longed for freedom, acceptance, and to be understood.

"I felt like I never had a break. It was like I was living in a cage and didn't belong anywhere. All I'd ever known was hate and trauma. I just wanted to be somewhere I felt safe, felt love, and that felt like home."

Through a referral from the leaving care team, Michael found himself at Action for Children's Amaryllis supported accommodation service, with just a few bags and a stringless guitar on his back. Welcomed in, Michael was shown his room and given his own front-door key. Service Coordinator Sally McInerney leads Amaryllis and remembers the day Michael arrived.

"When he walked through the door of Amaryllis, he looked lost, but there was a glimmer of hope, like he was wondering if this could finally be a place to call home. You could see straightaway he began to feel he belonged and was getting his identity back."

Due to his trauma, Michael's mental health remains an ongoing challenge. The staff have been a vital support, helping him feel safe, cared for, and accepted.

“At Amaryllis, the staff go above and beyond; it's not just their job; they genuinely care and always put young people first. Thanks to Action for Children's support I don't feel like a bird trapped in a cage anymore, I can fly. But that freedom is scary because my wing is still healing. I'm trying my best to recover, and even though I'm not used to accepting help, I've realised I need it.”

During a depressive episode, staff gently encouraged Michael to take part in activities like football or a trip out with housemates, support that Michael really valued.

“Amaryllis means the world to me. They never forced anything, it was always my choice, but they believed in me, and that freedom and

support changed my life. Whenever I'm struggling, whether it's with money, food, or fears outside the house, they're there, making sure I'm okay. Their kindness is almost overwhelming. And through it all, I've realised I'm better than the darkness inside me, there's a life worth living.”

Building trust is foundational at Amaryllis. Sally and the staff take time to get alongside each young person, forming genuine relationships rooted in care – often linked to their hobbies and interests. With Michael, this was through music. Staff saw this as a vital outlet and core part of his identity and arranged for his guitar to be restrung soon after he arrived. Using an approach called the ‘scaffolding approach’, they kept building upon the foundations that had been laid. Initially jamming at the kitchen table, he then performed at a local open mic night and later at the Action for Children's Stephenson's Awards, where he received a standing ovation.

“After performing, I felt like that insecure little boy inside me was gone. I’m really proud of the wings I’ve grown.”

Michael is also a keen learner. When Amaryllis received Chromebooks through the Dell Inspire programme, Sally and the staff started “lasagne and laptop” sessions for the house. Michael, determined to earn his first qualification, quickly got ahead. Learning as a group also boosted his sense of belonging, creating relationships that felt to Michael like a brotherhood.

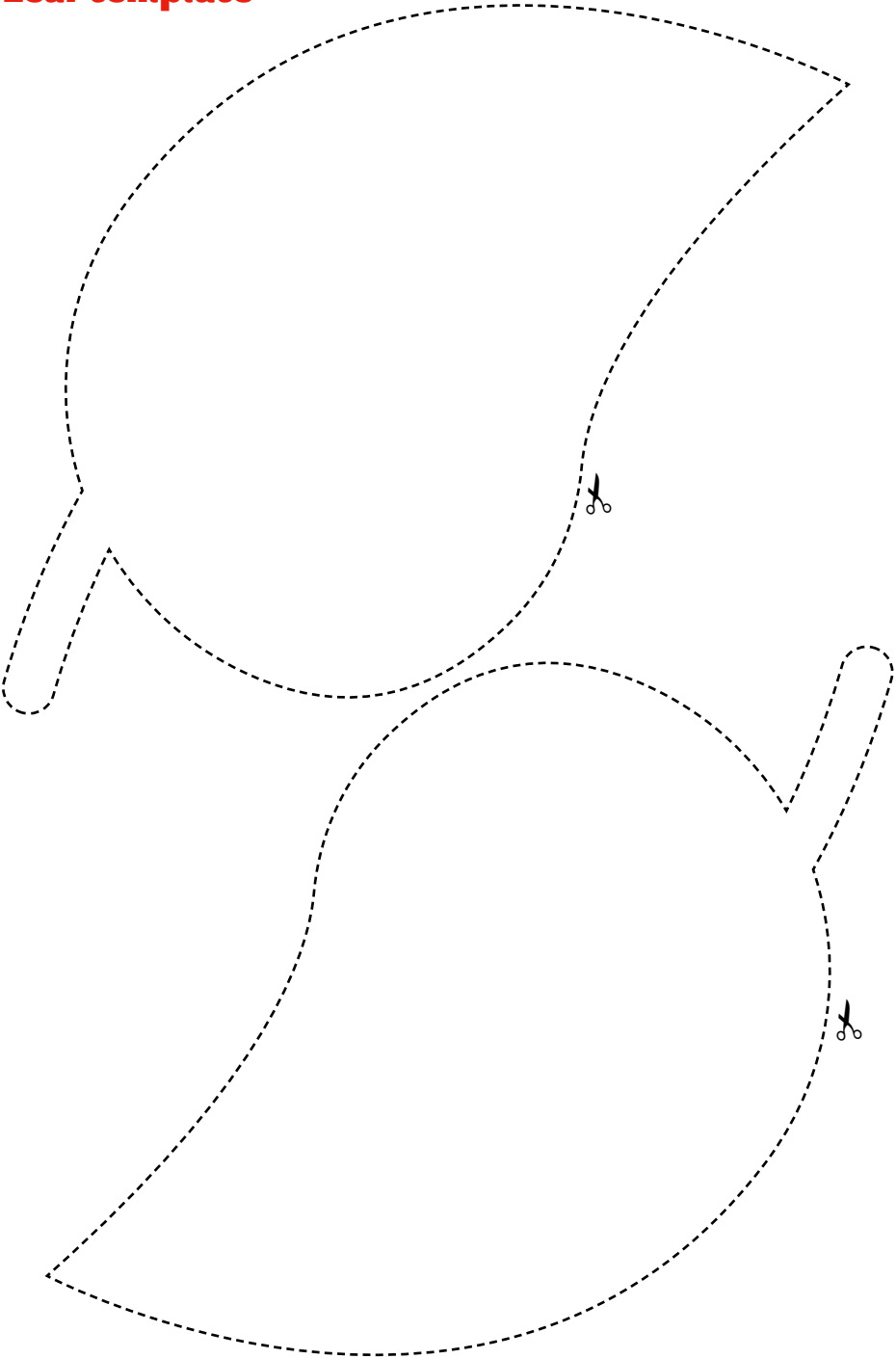
Amaryllis continues to support Michael’s growth, helping him build self-belief, develop skills for independent living, and pursue his dream of making it in music. He hopes to one day have his own house with a cat and a place to truly call his own:

“Action for Children has given me more than a roof. For the first time, I feel safe, seen, and truly cared for. It’s like a family. I don’t think I’d ever want to be anywhere else.”

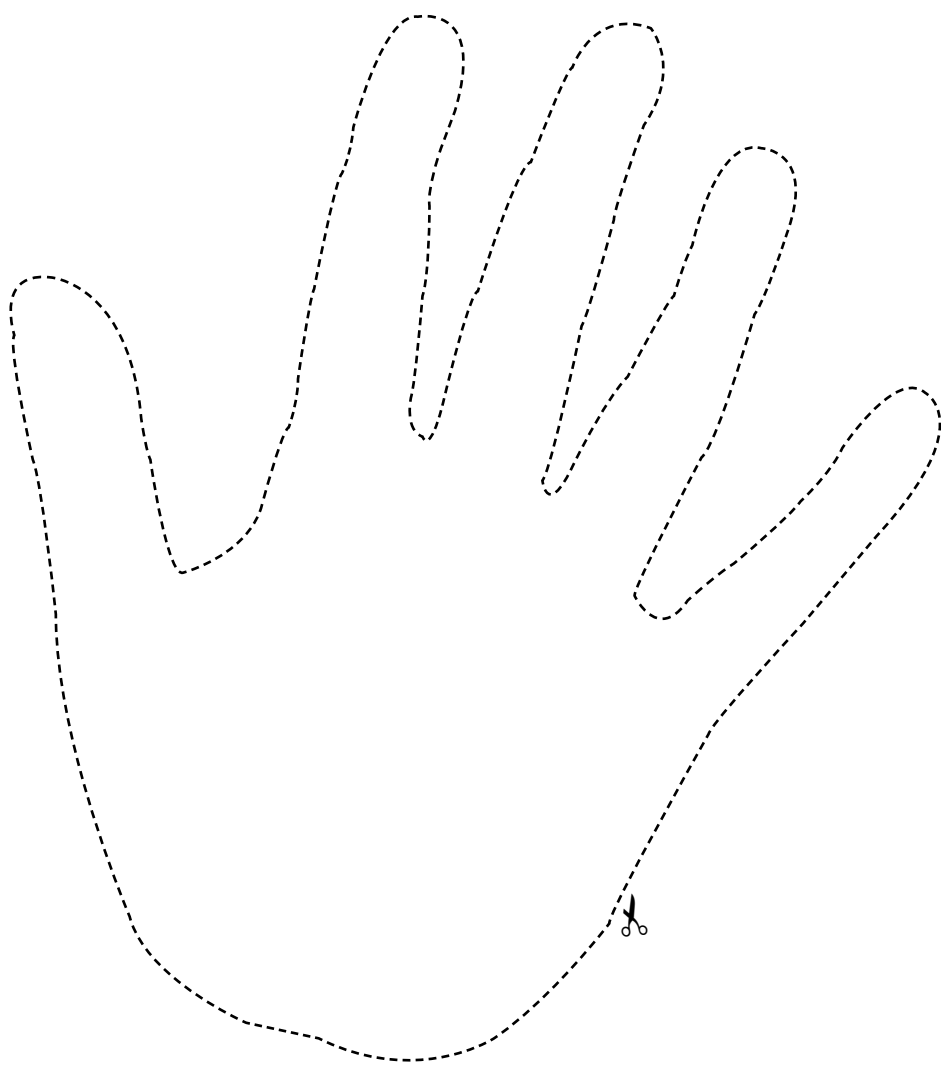


Michael playing at the Stephenson Awards

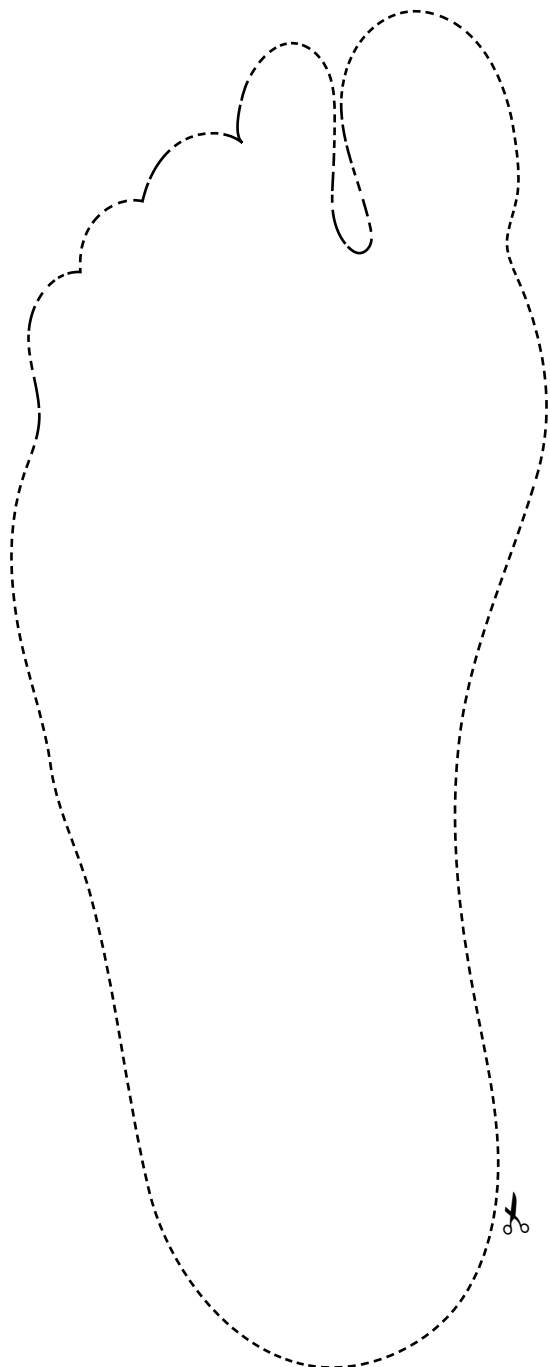
Leaf template



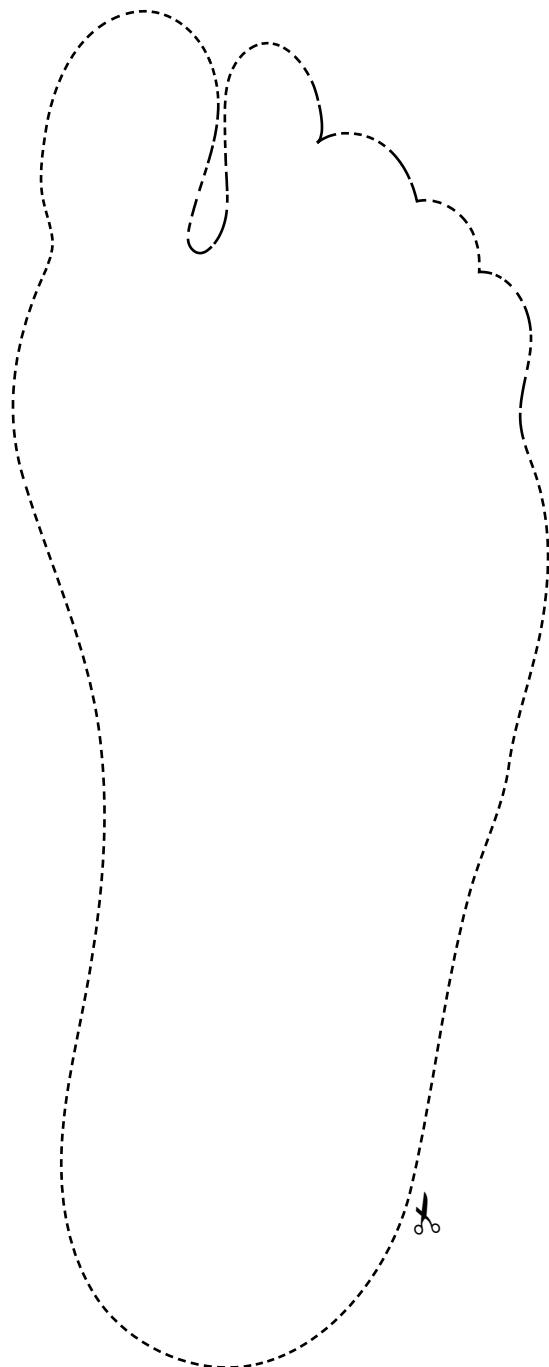
Hand template



Left foot template



Right foot template



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