Spirit of the Season

Guide to PowerPoint & Liturgy

PowerPoint and Liturgy

The use of technology in schools is ever advancing and what is now becoming commonplace in the classroom is finding its way into the assembly hall and the church. One such mechanism is PowerPoint, used for its evocative presentation of images and words, often accompanied by music to enhance pupil's understanding and, dare I say, concentration!

PowerPoint has a number of advantages:- unlike slide projectors, which had a tendency to jam at inappropriate moments, it is mostly efficient and flexible. The number of images to be found on the internet from which to choose is never ending. Its format is flexible enough to allow creativity and simplicity. It can be projected on to a wall or screen, to aid concentration and lead to moments of deep contemplation. Used well it can enhance liturgy by engaging the senses in a way words alone cannot. Used without care, however, it can be a distraction and a gimmick.

It is perhaps most suited to assemblies, where not only can images be projected to focus what is being said, but also prayers or responses which all can then join in. There are some moments of the Mass which lend themselves more than others to the use of PowerPoint. A single image might be used to enhance the readings. Although it is not advisable to put the text of scripture on the screen, as the Word is something proclaimed and heard, not read by individuals, but one or maybe two images or a key phrase might help pupils to focus what it is that they are hearing. It might be used during the Prayer of the Faithful (bidding prayers), combined with images of what we are being asked to pray for. It may also be used for a post-Communion reflection or thanksgiving.

Contents

Ten tips for using PowerPoint to enhance liturgy

- Set up well in advance of the beginning of the liturgy so that the screen is ready when students enter the liturgical space.

- Ensure you have a beginning and end slide so pupils are not distracted by looking at your desktop image during the rest of the liturgy!

- Choose good high-resolution images that will project well, bearing in mind each image will be magnified.

- Use words on a slide sparingly, to ensure they are of a reasonable size and to make them accessible to all.

- Choose colour combinations of text and background that mean that text can be easily read; a light background is usually more helpful.

- Choose a colour scheme for the background of the PowerPoint that relates to the liturgical season to reinforce what you are celebrating.

- Choose a suitable place for the screen/projection, so as not to detract from the lectern/ altar/liturgical focus:- it is not a focus in itself, but an aid to prayer.

- Use it sparingly – otherwise pupils will spend the whole liturgy staring at a large screen!

- Use simple slide transitions – an all singing all-dancing presentation might impress people with your technical skills but will distract people from prayer!

- Consider the lighting conditions of the liturgical space when planning your presentation.

Planning a time of prayer

For an assembly or other time of prayer, the structure of Gather, Word, Response/Symbolic action, Sending Forth is perhaps the most simple. One or two slides while pupils are arriving, especially if it takes some time for all pupils to gather, will help to focus their minds on what is ahead and give them something to reflect on as they wait. It is not advisable to put the text of scripture on the screen – the Word is something proclaimed and heard, not read by individuals – but perhaps one or two images or a key phrase might help pupils to remember what it is that they are hearing. If there is a response or prayer to be said together this might be included next, along with a song perhaps, followed by a final thought to leave them with as they wait to depart.

Using images and music

Images

One of the easiest ways of finding suitable images is to use an internet search engine such as Google or Yahoo and click on 'image search' before typing in a keyword or phrase to search. Finding the right images for the accompanying text and ensuring they are of a high enough resolution to project well when enlarged can be a laborious process for which there is no shortcut.

Music

Images accompanied by music are often a powerful tool for reflection and prayer. Care should be taken when using recorded music that it is of good quality and chosen for its combination of text and music which will aid prayer. Secular music might be appropriate for some liturgies, although this should be chosen with great care and not contrary to our faith in the resurrection.

DVD

As you become more adventurous you might want to consider dropping DVD clips into PowerPoint presentations. Some schools have also purchased digi-boxes which can convert short video clips into DVD for precisely this purpose.
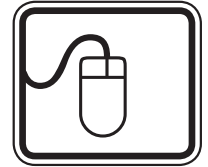
Copyright

Be aware that in a similar way to service sheets, text and images are copyright. Many schools will use either Calamus and/or CCLI for reproduction of text. Check what is permissable.

The look of it

In our preparation of liturgy, there should always be consideration of the specific needs of the community gathered. The following guidelines may be helpful for those using PowerPoint with pupils with special needs:-

- Consider the space you are using and whether strong sunshine will affect your use of PowerPoint.

- Check that the background colour you are using will work if you are projecting onto a coloured wall.

- Try to use a consistent with a style that pupils will become familiar with.

- Text should be of a reasonable size on PowerPoint and avoid putting too much text on one page.

- Use a non-cursive (sans-serif) font, e.g. Arial or Verdana as much as possible.

- Avoid using all capital letters as it makes it more difficult for pupils with dyslexia to read text.

- The colours red and green are not good backgrounds for those with colour blindness.

- Avoid any flashing graphic effects which over-stimulate the brain.

- Encourage students to help prepare PowerPoint – they will often be very familiar with the technology and will be able to give their own interpretation to a text. It can lead this to being a powerful act of participation and shared leadership.

What we have seen and heard

It is always good to evaluate our worship including our use of technology.

- Over the last year in what contexts have you used technology?
    - class
    - year group
    - key stage
    - whole school
- How have you used technology this year to enhance liturgy?
- What have you learnt?
- What skills or training do you need to develop this over the coming year?
- Are there any budget implications?
- What has worked well?
- What could be improved?
- Is there an opportunity to share your responses with other staff?
- Have you saved this year's work to use again or modify?
- Ask students and staff what worked and what didn't!