

Using the Senses in the Church

In almost every faith worship is designed to engage all the different senses. This may seem less obvious in an Anglican Church than, for example, a Hindu mandir with its riot of colour. It is also more difficult to appreciate this in an empty church – as the list below shows the senses really come into play during worship, rather than in appreciating the building.

	When the church is empty	When worship is taking place
<p>SIGHT Most of the things we learn we learn through using our eyes – look carefully to find the special things</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shape and design of church • Furniture design • Where can we find the cross • Light through stained glass windows • The liturgical colour of the season in altar frontals, vestments etc • Decorations specific to a festival e.g. the bare church at Lent, or a paschal candle • Carvings and statues, paintings and banners • Candles and the use of light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of vestments and colour • Processions, movement and symbolic actions • Candles and light • How the artefacts are used
<p>HEARING Worship is centred on listening to the word of God in many different ways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the silence! • Use your voices and listen for the echoes! • Bells – bell tower, and possibly a sanctus bell • clocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prayer • music • chanting • hymns • readings • liturgy • the use of silence • bells

<p>SMELL Smells can be evocative and trigger the memory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that old building smell – damp? • polish and other cleaning materials • flowers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incense • candles • flowers
<p>TOUCH Because our hands are very sensitise we are constantly detecting things through touch without even really thinking about it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brass • marble • wood • stone • fabric • plastic • paper • textures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • passing the peace • making the sign of the cross • sharing bread and wine • anointing • baptising • laying on of hands (confirmation, ordination, blessing)
<p>TASTE The central Christian act of worship is focussed on bread and wine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bread and wine • harvest festival • food as a symbol in stained glass windows or carvings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bread • wine • water

The poem below demonstrates vividly how colour can set mood, and may be a stimulus for the banner making suggested in the topic on using the senses in church, or in creating more poetry:

What is the colour of Easter?
 What is the shade of its name?
 Is it yellow like chicks
 And like daffodils
 Or red like the colour of pain?

What is the colour of Easter?
 What is the shade of its name?
 Is it white like a lamb
 And a spring-cloud
 Or black like the colour of shame?

What is the colour of Easter?
 What is the shade of its name?
 Is it brown like decay
 And old photos
 Or gold like the colour of grain?

What? 12