



**A Liturgy to Celebrate! Going Back to School 2
Week Three of 2016 Christian Education Season
August 21, 2016
Elinor Brown**

If your church doesn't have any school teachers or staff, please still plan to celebrate and pray for those who are teaching our children and young people (community folks, grandkids or grandparents, family, etc.).

Preparation for the Sunday:

- *Locate a copy of the song "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang to play as a gathering song for worship each Sunday of the CE Season. You may not want to play the entire song since it is about four minutes long and repeats.*
- *Ask your worship committee or a creative bunch of folks to decorate the worship area with growing items such as plants and seeds, a bag of good dirt, small shovels, a watering can and gardening gloves and other things that will remind the congregation that school teachers and staff are nurturing our children and youth to be good people in their lives outside of the church as well as inside the church walls. You may want to decorate with pots of plants that can then be given to the teachers/staff to take home with them reminding them of their ministry in the classroom.*
- *If you have slides before and during worship, you may want to have pictures of the teachers/staff in their classroom/office settings.*
- *Look through the Additional Activities at the end of this liturgy and decide which of these you will do. Make plans to do them and gather materials as needed. You will also need to publicize and recruit people to help you with them so leave plenty of time to do so.*

Call to Worship

Leader: Come, God's children, listen as God teaches us to respect the Lord.

People: We will study God's teachings and follow in God's footsteps.

Leader: The Law of the Lord is perfect; it gives us new life.

God's teachings last forever, and they give wisdom to ordinary people.

People: We will study God's teachings and follow in God's footsteps.

Leader: We praise you, Lord, for being our teacher.

Even in the darkest night, your teachings fill our minds.

People: We will study God's teachings and follow in God's footsteps.

Leader: We keep your laws in mind, O God, and never look away from your teachings.

People: We will study God's teachings and follow in God's footsteps.

Leader: Show us your paths and teach us to follow.

People: We will study God's teachings and follow in God's footsteps.

Leader: You said that you will point out the road that we should follow.

You promised to be our teacher and watch over us.

People: We will study God's teachings and follow in God's footsteps.

Leader: Come, God's children, listen as God teaches us to respect the Lord.

People: We will study God's teachings and follow in God's footsteps.

—adapted from various psalms (CEV)

Call to Confession

Proverbs, the Book of Wisdom, says this: "If you don't confess your sins, you will not prosper. But God will be merciful if you confess your sins and give them up." As children of God, we are smart enough to realize what we must do. Let us confess our sins to the All-Knowing God.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

God of all wisdom, we come to you again like little children confessing their wrongs to their teacher, knowing that we deserve punishment, but hoping for mercy nonetheless. We look out into a world of hurting people and only think of ourselves. We hear of those who are grieving and desperate and whine that we do not have the latest and greatest popular thing. We take in the suffering of others and turn our backs to them because we are "too busy" to help, selfishly thinking we need to help our own first. God, convict us like you did Paul on the road to Damascus. Teach us through all ways possible that your way is the way we need to follow and all others are at best secondary. Teach us your ways. Make them known to us. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our perfect teacher. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hebrews 2:17 says “He [Jesus] had to be one of us, so that he could serve God as our merciful and faithful high priest and sacrifice himself for the **forgiveness** of our sins. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, God has graciously forgiven our sins—wiped them away as if they were never there. Friends, believe the good news. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Children’s Message

Read the book Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes. If you do not own this book, this is a great opportunity to buy it for yourself or for your church’s nursery or library. After reading it, you may want to make the following points:

- Today the worship service is celebrating school teachers and those who work at schools.
- This story about Lilly and her purse and three quarters and movie star sunglasses shows that sometimes we like people and sometimes we don’t, but that may say more about us and the mood we are in and less about them.
- Teachers like to be liked by their students and like for their students to want to be teachers because of them, but they also have to do things in class sometimes to help the whole class learn rather than always doing just fun stuff.
- Mr. Slinger did understand that Lilly was excited about her purse and everything in it, but Mr. Slinger also had a very important job to do. He had to teach Lilly and her friends so they could grow up to be smart and healthy and able to be patient and share and all that good stuff.
- God has prepared teachers and people who work at school with some special skills: not only have they learned stuff like how to read and how to add and subtract, they have something in them that makes them want to teach us so we can be the best people God has made us to be.
- Today we are celebrating teachers and people who work at schools. They are special people and ones that God has given a special joy to want to teach. I want you to think about your teachers and how special they are. Let us pray for them and thank God that they want to teach people like us. Then pray something like this: God, we thank you so much for our teachers and what they mean to us. We know that like Lilly, we don’t always see that they are caring for us even if they are. Help us to learn all we can from them so we can teach others in all different kinds of ways. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Christ Jesus,

When we open our eyes, may you be there;

When we open our ears, may you be there;

When we open our mouths, may you be there;

When we open the scripture, may you be there.

Help us to see with your eyes;

Help us to hear with your ears;

Help us to speak your truth in love;
Help us to make time for you, for others, for ourselves. Amen.

—Prayer by Rupert Kaye adapted from *prayforschools.org*

Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon

- Jeremiah 1:4-10—God is calling Jeremiah to speak the words that God needs the people to hear.

The pastor might talk about God being with teachers to give them the tools and skills they need to teach and nurture others.

The pastor may want to utilize “The Cricket Story” found in *Doorways to the Soul: 52 Wisdom Tales from Around the World*, edited by Elisa Davy Pearmain. This Contemporary North American story talks about hearing in the midst of our busy lives.

Your church might ask the teachers and school staff to sit together in an area of the church and the pastor might come to speak in front of them rather than behind the pulpit. This is a way to set these people apart for this special service.

A Prayer for All Christians Working in Education

Lord of all things,

We thank you for the women and men you have called to work in education.

Bless their hearts with your love, joy and peace.

Season their words with your patience, kindness, and goodness.

Fill their minds with your faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

When *they* respond to a broken-hearted child

Show *them* how to be big-hearted.

When *they* reach out to a rebellious teen

Remind *them* to be obedient to you.

When *they* advise a lonely mature student

Help *them* to be Christ Jesus to them.

When *they* meet with an angry parent

Let *them* see a child of God.

When *they* give advice to a discouraged colleague

Give *them* helpful and encouraging words.

When *they* speak to visitors and strangers

Grant *them* the gift of hospitality. Amen.

—Prayer by Rupert Kaye from *prayforschools.org*

Invitation to the Offering

There is an intellectual argument in which some people say that we should not give 10%, or a tithe, because that is an Old Testament practice and when Jesus came, he changed everything from Old Testament ways to New Testament ways. Usually the argument stops there, but if we are going to follow Jesus' teaching and example, then we are asked to give all—100%. It's something to think about as we give back to God, what God has so graciously given to us. Let us give our tithes and offerings.

If you intend to do the Teacher Tree during worship (see additional activities below), you may want to do it here.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God, we have brought just a small portion of what we have, knowing that you gave all for us. We ask that you will bless this money and teach us how to use it to further your kingdom here on earth. Amen.

Charge and Benediction

Go out into the world to Celebrate! Celebrate all that you have learned this day and remember to share God's teachings with everyone you meet!

Celebrate going into the world treating everyone with the love and peace that Jesus has taught us to give!

Celebrate new experiences knowing that we are never alone for the Holy Spirit is always there holding us close and guiding us to do the right thing!

Go in peace!

Additional Activities

- **The Teacher Tree**—This idea is adapted from *Brim: Creative Overflow in Worship Design* by Andra Moran and Suzanne Castle and can be done as a part of worship or not. Beg/borrow/buy an indoor potted tree either live or artificial. Fill a basket with either artificial fruit or paper fruit cut outs. Decide on a way to hang these on the tree. Have Sharpies available and ask each person to do one of two things: If they are a teacher or school worker, write on the fruit one gift they have that they can bring to help the students with which they work, thinking especially of how it will nurture and grow those students OR if they are not a teacher/school worker, write on the fruit one gift that one of their teachers had (or have) that has nurtured and grown them. If used during the worship service, you might have this tree near the communion table in the front of the sanctuary.

- **Seed Ball**—As a congregation, plan a time to make seed balls. It is an activity that takes a little amount of time and can be done as an intergenerational activity. Go to www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seed_ball or look on pinterst to learn how to make seed balls and the materials you will need to make them.
- **Flower Bulbs**—Commit as a congregation to buy and plant flower bulbs at the local school(s) which your members work. If you don't have any school teachers or staff, find a school to plant at anyway. Be sure to ask permission from school administration first and let them know that you are honoring their teachers and staff with this activity. If there is a reason you cannot plant, you might offer to clean the school grounds, rake leaves or do something else nice to serve the school.