



**A Liturgy to Celebrate! A New Year of Sunday School
Week Four of 2017 Christian Education Season
August 27, 2017
Elinor Brown**

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 items of celebration. You may want to decorate the altar or communion table with items such as wrapped gifts, party hats, leis, streamers, Sunday school resources, etc. If you want to celebrate with cake after worship, place it on the communion table until then. You may want to pass out party hats for everyone to wear. Make it a fun occasion and let the children and youth know that everything in church does not have to be a somber occasion. You may want to roll in a white board that says Celebrate! A New Year of Sunday School.*
- *Well before this Sunday, ask the youth of the church or other creative persons to put together a video celebrating Sunday school and show it before worship gets started. It may be as simple as getting videos of church members/attenders to say "We love Sunday School!" If it is not possible to do a video, you can always take pictures of the same groups holding a "We love Sunday school" sign.*
- *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

It would be powerful to have a child or several children read this as the Call to Worship. If you don't have children in your church, you may want to have youth or adults adapt this letter to fit your congregation. You may also want Sunday school teachers and leaders to lead the various prayers and parts of worship.

Dear Teacher,

My mom tells me I'm going to Sunday school again this year. That's cool. Here's what I hope will happen:

- I hope you'll love me like nobody's business. You don't have to be the greatest singer or storyteller or craft expert ever, but you do have to love me lots. I hear that's what Jesus did, even when his disciples disappointed him.
- I hope you show me that Jesus is living in your heart and that he's changed your life—and I hope you want to tell me about it. If it's real for you, I'm going to want to try it too.
- I hope you know how to joke around a little. My mom says that laughter is the shortest distance between two people. What are you going to do if the bottle of glue tips over in your purse or the craft doesn't turn out the way it's supposed to? When we laughter together I feel good—and I feel good about being in Sunday school.
- I hope you can go with the flow. Once my friend came to Sunday school so sad because his grandma had just died. That day we just talked about heaven and made paper flowers to put on her grave. We all felt better afterward.
- I hope you don't think my faith is not as good as your faith. I know I've got lots to learn because I'm just starting out on this faith journey thing. But Jesus said grown-ups should have faith like a kid's, and that must mean something. Can you show me that there's a kid inside of you?
- I hope you'll expect the best from me. Even if I sometimes complain and whine, I'll be pleased that you think I can grow to be the best I can possibly be.
- I hope you'll understand where I'm coming from—please try to look at the world from a kid's point of view. And remember, I don't have all the thinking and physical skills grown-ups have.
- I hope we get to move around and do cool things, instead of always sitting and listening. Moving, talking, looking, drawing—that's what helps me learn!

There's more, but I'll bet you get the idea. Deep down, I'm really glad you want to help me learn more about God and more about me. Thanks for being here...hope you learn something too!

Love,

Your "kid" for the year!

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Call to Confession

We are taught from an early age that it is not right to do wrong. And we are taught that when we do wrong, it is right to ask forgiveness—from our parents, from our family, from our friends.

Just as we do this in our everyday lives, so we do it here in church every Sunday. Let us ask forgiveness from God for those things that we have done wrong and for those things that we have left undone.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

O God, like an errant child we come to you asking for your forgiveness yet knowing that we are not worthy of it. We shun people at work because they don't believe the things we believe. We turn away from those on the streets who have their hands out because they don't get a job and take care of their own needs. We take out our frustration on our spouse, our kids, our loved ones when all they have done is come to us seeking our love.

O God, like a loving parent, you stretch your hands out and with a comforting embrace tell us we are forgiven. We are to embrace others for their diversity. We are to welcome those who are strangers into the light of our hospitality. We are to intentionally set aside time to listen to our children read or offer to hold the hand of a friend who is hurting.

O God, as you forgive us, let us forgive one another. In the name of Jesus, the one who is forgiveness incarnate. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

We had turned away from God, but God turns us around, has mercy on us, and send us on our faith journey renewed and refreshed. Friends, believe the good news—in Christ Jesus we are forgiven. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Children's Message

Read the book Old Turtle by Douglas Wood. 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 scripture is talking about those people who are in our lives that teach us how to live in a way that God likes very much.
- In the story the animals and land began an argument about what God is. It makes sense that the animals and land would describe God the way they did because that was what they knew and what they were like: like the fish saying God was a good swimmer, etc. But they had so many feelings about their own ideas that they couldn't or wouldn't listen to and believe what they others said. Until Old Turtle stopped them. And she said that God was all of these things and more.
- Then Old Turtle said that there were going to be people on the earth and they will remind us of what God is. So the people came but they didn't remember who God was and so they started arguing just like the animals and land did. So again, Old Turtle said to stop! And all the animals and land told the people who God is and it made Old Turtle so happy that she smiled. And God did too.

- Old Turtle is like a very good Sunday school teacher. We all have different ideas and our teachers, the ones we have now and the ones we had before, have helped show us that God can be seen all around us. And our teachers can help us discover lots of things about God. It may not just be our teachers that show us these things, but all of the people in this church because they promised at our baptism that they would teach us about God.
- Then pray something like this: God, we thank you for those people in our lives who show us every day about you and your love for us. Help us show them how much we care for them and appreciate all that they do for us because they love you so much. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Leader: As we come to the word, we come as vessels,

People: Ready to be filled, willing to be poured out again and again;

Leader: We come as students,

People: Open to learn, so that we may impart to others;

Leader: We come as instruments,

People: Waiting to be tuned, in order to render fine music;

Leader: We come as tools,

People: Available to be sharpened, so that we may be effective and precise;

All: Let every part of our beings—heads and hands, hearts and spirits, intellect and feelings—be available to you, O God, at this time and always. Amen.

*—adapted, J. Stanley Earhart, from *The Gifts We Bring*, v.3, Ecumenical Stewardship Center*

Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon

- Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16—Offer love to all; remember your leaders and teachers and imitate their faith; do what is pleasing to God.

This scripture provides an opportunity for the pastor to talk about those saints in our lives who have taught us and share with their students in a way that pleasing to God.

This day is a time for all of the church to celebrate and to encourage those who do not attend Sunday school or other educational opportunities to do so. It would not hurt to have some of the sermon time to educate members about what is available to them, people of all ages not just children. Be sure to take advantage of this time.

Commissioning Litany for Sunday School Teachers and Church Leaders

As a part of this service, you may want to have the CE Chairperson or Sunday School Superintendent say a few words and/or have a few persons share briefly (1-4 sentences) why they go to Sunday school.

Leader: We gather today to celebrate the beauty of teaching and learning,
of care and support, of leading and following.

People: We thank you, God.

Leader: These before you have committed to serving in the teaching ministry of this church.

Whether male or female, young or old, we all have something new to learn.
Do you, who are called, covenant to lead us in that learning?

Teachers: We covenant to allow the Spirit to lead us.

Leader: And to the Christian Education Ministry Team:

Do you covenant to offer support to these who will teach,
providing them with materials, curriculum, and space
and lifting them up in prayer as they serve?

CE Team: We covenant to offer prayer and support to these who are called.

Leader: And to you in the pews that are the Body of Christ:

Do you covenant to be active participants in the groups or classes
which you attend, sharing your own insights, discoveries and interpretations?

People: We covenant to be active participants.

Leader: Romans declares: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

We praise God for call and for “yes’s” from those with willing hearts.

God we ask your blessing on these before us.

Grant them wisdom and patience; knowledge and understanding
as they serve you by serving us.

In the name of Jesus whose example we strive to follow. Amen.

—*Samantha Hassell, chairperson of the Discipleship Ministry Team*

If you intend to give out special certificates (see Additional Activities below), you may want to do it here.

If you intend to have a special time for promoting students, you may want to do it here. You may want to go to milestonesministry.org and purchase a milestone prayer stone for those who are moving to another class. There is one for beginning to go to Sunday school and others that can be used for classes along the way.

Invitation to the Offering

You are what you eat. You are what you read. You are what you give. May our offerings reflect health and wholeness as we share God’s gifts through the church.

—*Janet Long, from The Gifts We Bring, v.3, Ecumenical Stewardship Center*

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We rejoice O God, that you have not abandoned us to our own greed or failed to call us to account for the use of resources in our care. Thank you for this moment in worship, amidst your people, when we are able to come bearing gifts that you use to bless the world. Humbly we are aware that these offerings, given out of love for you, are also the gifts that you use to deliver us from our own self-centeredness. In the name of the one who came teaching us to give, and offering us to the gifts of bread and cup. Amen.

—*Claudia E. Grant, from The Gifts We Bring, v.3, Ecumenical Stewardship Center*

Charge and Benediction

Go out into the world to Celebrate! Celebrate life!

Celebrate this new year of Sunday school and what new things we will learn about God!

Celebrate the relationships we will make and renew with others who also love God!

As you celebrate know that God is there to teach you,

Jesus Christ is there to help you live well,

And the Holy Spirit is there to inspire you. Go in peace!

Music Ideas

Hymns

Here I am, Lord

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me (adding teach)

Lord Speak to Me, That I May Speak

Lord, When I Came Into this Live

Take My Life

Today We All are Called to be Disciples

Special Music with a servant leadership theme

Additional Activities

- **Weekly Appreciation Gifts**—Get your creative minds on giving small gifts to all the teachers each week for the Christian Education Season (August and September). Each Sunday leave a small gift with a note on it thanking them for their service. The notes can be humorous (the cornier the better, ie a plastic tumbler that says “You quench my thirst for Bible knowledge”). Gifts can be purchased at a dollar store or made by church members. The main idea is to let the teachers know that you are thinking of them and thanking them for their hard work.
- **Teacher/Christian Educator of the Year/Patron Certificates**—As a way of honoring a particular person who has served the congregation as a teacher, plan to give a Teacher of the Year and/or Christian Educator of the Year certificate from the Discipleship Ministry Team. The Teacher/Christian Educator of the Year certificates, \$100, can be given to recognize and honor the faithful service of a teacher or leader in the congregation. For \$100, a Patron of Christian Education certificate can be given to recognize a person’s devotion to Christian education. A Golden Patron of Christian Education, \$150, can be bestowed on an individual or church group who has served the church through educational ministry for fifty or more years. A CPYC Perpetual Conferee Certificate, \$50, can be given to recognize the importance of this even in the lives of those to whom it is given.
- **Endowment Gifts**—There are more than 40 Discipleship Ministry Endowments in the area of Christian education. These endowments were started either by or in honor of

many saints of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Make a gift to one of these endowments in honor of anyone: a teacher, a student, a pastor, someone on the CE Committee, your favorite pet!