



A Liturgy to Celebrate! Going Off to College
Week Two of 2017 Christian Education Season
August 13, 2017
Elinor Brown

If your church doesn't have anyone going off to college, please still plan to celebrate and pray for those going to college (community kids, grandkids, 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 college-type items. Line the table with road maps. You may want to decorate the altar or communion table with items such as a college mascot, a laptop computer, pom poms, a letter jacket, a small suitcase, etc.*
- *Make a prayer tree for each person going off to college or beginning a career after high school graduation. Place a large branch in a bucket or vase of stones. Have enough pieces of paper (8-1/2x11" cut into fours) and pens for members to write a brief prayer for the student. If you have more than one student, have the paper in a particular color for each student. Pass these out before worship asking members to write the prayer for worship. Then they can save the papers for later in the service. Have clothes pins available. Place the prayer tree(s) near the altar. Have a poster size picture of the student(s) displayed or as a part of a slide presentation. It need not be a graduation photo(s), but might be one of them doing some sort of service in the church.*
- *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

Each line of this call to worship is to be a body prayer—a prayer acted out with motions. You may want to ask several children to lead this call and have them “rehearse” it with the congregation before the worship service begins. They may also want to lead the Prayer of Confession body prayer.

Leader: With all my heart I praise you LORD,

Women: and with all that I am I praise your holy name!

Leader: With all my heart I praise you LORD!

Men: I will never forget how kind you have been.

Leader: You forgive our sins, heal us when we are sick, and protect us from death.

Children: Your kindness and love are crowns on our heads.

**Youth: Each day that we live, you provide for our needs
and give us the strength of a young eagle.**

Leader: Just as parents are kind to their children,

All: You O LORD are kind to all who worship you.

Leader: You are always kind to those who worship you

All: And you keep your promises to our descendants who faithfully obey you.

Youth: All of God’s creation and all that God rules come and praise your LORD!

All: With all my heart I praise you LORD!

—based on Psalm 103 (CEV)

Call to Confession

What do we need to confess? We need to confess those times when we have turned our backs on God and others. Why do we need to confess? We need to confess because God says that if we do, our sins will be forgiven and we will be in a right relationship with God again. How do we confess? We confess by opening our hearts and minds and saying we are sorry for doing wrong and really mean it. That is what, why and how we confess our sins—and there is no question that we need to do so now.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

God of all wisdom, through Jesus Christ you have called us to faithfulness and new understanding. You have given us a teacher, yet like the disciples, we have often turned away from learning.

You have given us the word, yet we choose to live by our own word. You have created in wisdom, yet we destroy your creation with our abuse of knowledge and our lack of wisdom. Forgive us, O God.

Awaken and renew us with your Spirit that we might become wise stewards of the gift of life. In Christ we pray. Amen.

—*Jacquelyn L. Foster, from The Gifts We Bring, v.2, Ecumenical Stewardship Center*

Assurance of Pardon

The psalmist asks “How great is God’s love for all who worship God?” and answers “Greater than the distance between heaven and earth!” Then the psalmist asks “How far has the LORD taken our sins from us?” and answers “Farther than the distance from east to west!” If we believe the psalmist, and we do, our sins, if confessed, are carried by God so far away from us that they are forgiven and forgotten. Friends, believe the good news. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Children’s Message

Read the book The Lord is My Shepherd by Hans Wilhelm. 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 God supplying our needs and because of that we are like a garden planted by a spring—nice and healthy.
- The story from the book is also from the Bible and talks about God giving us what we need.
- God is like a shepherd—do you know what sheep need? They need grass to eat and sleep in; they need water to drink and to make them feel better when they are tired; they need someone who cares about them and will lead them on a good path so they will not get hurt even if it scary and dark and they don’t know the way; the shepherd knows where he is going, leads the way, and protects them from danger; and because of this the sheep have a great life.
- We know that God is with us to protect and care for and love us, too. God sent people like our family and friends to be God’s hands and feet to us.
- Today we are celebrating those young people who are heading off to college and may be beginning their work careers after high school. Let’s pray for God to protect and guide them. Then pray something like this: God, we know that you are always with and give us the things that we need. Help us to use the things you give us to be like a flourishing garden—giving to others from what we have received. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Open our eyes Lord. We want to see what you have envisioned for us. Open our ears Lord. We want to hear the truth of what you have to say. Open our hearts Lord. We want to do your will found in what we have seen and heard in your message today. Amen.

Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon

- Isaiah 58:9b-14—God will supply needs and you will be like a garden by a spring.

The pastor might talk about God being with us everywhere even in college and that God will supply our needs.

Your church might ask the youth 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 can also be a special time as this person(s) may be going off to college very soon after this service.

Prayers for Those in Transition

Ask members to take out their prayer paper. Ask them to fold it into an airplane, a vehicle that takes people off to new adventures. If they don't know how to fold an airplane, explain that they fold their paper in half the long way and unfold it; they fold the top two corners to the center fold that they made; they can leave like that or fold the sides in again one or two times (or give it to a child sitting next to them to do). Then turn the whole thing over and fold the two sides along the center fold. Plane made. Then ask the one(s) who will be going off to college to come near the Prayer Tree. Ask members to bring their prayers to the front and clothes pin them to the tree and remain at the altar encircling the student(s). After all the prayers have been brought, pray the following prayer:

O God, we thank you so much that you are a God of change—sometimes the change is good and sometimes the change is difficult, but we always experience your strength and presence in the midst of it.

We pray for those who are starting school...

For those who are graduating...

For those who are leaving home...

For those who are getting married...

For those who are touched by divorce...

For those who are bringing a child into the world...

For those who are grieving the loss of a family member...

For those who are being welcomed into a new community...

For those who are saying goodbye to all they know and love...

Grant all of these, this one that stands before us, and all those we know the knowledge that they are loved by us and are wrapped in our love just as they are wrapped in your love. Amen.

—Prayer Tree idea adapted from *Blessing New Voices* by Maren C. Tirabassi

If you intend to offer the student(s) a prayer shawl or blanket (see additional activities below), you may want to do it here.

Invitation to the Offering

Richard Cunningham says “Giving is an act of loving with no strings attached! Giving means sharing with those who don't seem to respond and don't do things the way we want them done.

Giving means feeding the souls and bodies of hungry people. Giving means refreshing the world, giving new hope to the people. Giving means to love the other as much as you love yourself.

—*from The Gifts We Bring, v.2, Ecumenical Stewardship Center*

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Through these gifts Lord, we go where we cannot travel; we witness where our voices cannot be heard; we speak in languages which we have never learned; and we love those whom we have never seen. This we do, in the name of your gift to us, Jesus Christ. Amen.

—*C. William Nichols, from The Gifts We Bring, v.2, Ecumenical Stewardship Center*

Charge and Benediction

Go out into the world to Celebrate! Celebrate a new way of living while remembering the very best that you have been taught!

Celebrate going off to college and the independence that comes with it knowing that with that independence comes responsibility!

Celebrate new friends while remembering those to whom you have said goodbye!

And as you go, remember that God is there to protect you,

Jesus Christ is there to love you,

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

Additional Activities

- **College Survival Kits**—Pack a box for each college bound student that is associated with the church. This box needs to include things that might normally magically appear in their home but all of the sudden are not in their college dorm room: plastic bandage strips, Kleenex, extra toothbrushes and paste, stamps and stationery, etc. It may also include some comfort snacks and candy and perhaps some things that might remind them of their church home such as a church mug, a church t-shirt or the web address of the church's website.
- **Prayer Shawl/Blanket Gift**—As a congregation, you might want to give the person going off to college a prayer shawl or blanket as a gift. If your church does not have a prayer shawl ministry, you may want to start one. You can learn more about a prayer shawl ministry at <http://www.shawlministry.com/> or other websites. You may want to purchase a label that can be sewn in it that says something like: You are wrapped in God's Love and the name of your church. You can get labels inexpensively at <https://www.labelweavers.com/sewing-labels-c-12.html> or a site like it. If you do not have any crafty people in your church, a polar fleece blanket can be given and labeled or even monogrammed inexpensively. The idea is that when the student sees the item in their dorm room, they will remember that they are not alone.
- **Care Person**—Have all college students and young people associated with a particular person in the congregation. Ask that person to be a care person to their student doing

things like sending birthday and other holiday cards to them, catching them up on news about church members, sending small care packages reminding them that the church is thinking about them and other gifts of kindness. One church sends a care package to their college students at Halloween so they can give yummy Halloween candy to the students and can start a tradition that the student can look forward to all their college years.

- **Blessing Service**—An important way to raise up every young person graduating from high school is to have a blessing service. This service is a brief worship service that focuses on the student(s) and their gifts to the church throughout the years. It gives church members a chance to share their love for the student(s) even if they don't plan to attend graduation, etc. A possible order of worship might be: a hymn, welcome and invocation, introduction of the graduate(s) by a church member who has been a Sunday school teacher, mentor, or had some other connection with the student(s), a time for blessings where parents, family and friends are invited to share best wishes, memories and blessings for the graduates, memories in pictures (slide show of graduate(s) at different ages particularly associated with the church, a presentation from the church which might be a Bible, blankets, etc, and a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing for the graduate(s). The service can be brief and held on another night other than Sunday, but it can be extremely important to the graduate(s) and their families.