

FALL KICKOFF with BLESSING OF BACKPACKS (Rally Day)

This kid-friendly service is intended for use at the beginning of a new church school year. Parts may stand alone or be used together as a prayer for education programs and a commissioning for teachers and other leaders. Have kids/other students bring a backpack to be blessed; small tags with prayers on them may be made or purchased ahead of time.

Each reading is short and incorporates simple songs that make it easy for children to serve as readers. You may also want to incorporate sign language and involve the children's choir as song leaders.

PRELUDE

I GIVE YOU MY HALLELUJAH

Wakerley

WELCOME AND INTRO

CALL TO WORSHIP

Calling all children of the Living God.

God's love is good news for everyone at every age.

Let us sing and pray together.

We hear God's words in songs, prayers, play and rest.

Let us sing and play together.

We come together in different ways with all our differences.

Let us worship together.

All are welcome in God's church.

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me," that means everyone!

Let us worship together in God's church.

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray,

God our teacher, who helps us to understand the world around us,
thank you for our schools and teachers who help us learn about the world.

**God, who came as a child to show us how to be your children,
thank you for giving us minds to grow in understanding through our words and
actions, and even in our play.**

Today we celebrate the beginning of this school year and ask for your blessings on all
students, teachers, and families and friends who support them.

**As we celebrate, we remember those who do not have the resources they need and
struggle to learn in an unjust world.**

We come to worship together and to learn new ways to serve God.

Open our hearts so we may never stop learning how to be your church.

Amen.

HYMN

OPEN OUR EYES, LORD

TFWS 2086

HEARING GOD'S WORD **Matthew 22:34-40**

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTING ON GOD'S WORD (a youth or church leader may be invited to share a few words about how God's love will help them through this school year)

BLESSING OF CHURCH TEACHERS & LEADERS

RESPONSIVE READING (church representative and child may read these parts)

Church education leader: As we begin this new school year, we turn our hearts to you, Loving God. Lead us to grow in your love, to share our gifts, and to serve you faithfully.

Child: Open our eyes, Lord. We want to see Jesus.

Congregation: Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. (*Heb. 12:2a*)

Child: We want to reach out and touch him, and say that we love him.

Congregation: To love is to keep God's commandments. (*1 John 5:3a*)

Child: Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen.

Congregation: For Jesus said,

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." (*John 10:27*)

Child: Open our eyes, Lord. We want to see Jesus.

Congregation: No one's ears have ever heard of a God like you.

No one's eyes have ever seen a God who is greater than you.

No God but you acts for the good of those who trust in you. (*Isa. 64:4*)

Church education leader: This school year may we all grow in faith and knowledge of Jesus. To God be glory, now and forever! Amen. (*2 Pet. 3:18*)

HYMN

STEP BY STEP

Worship and Song 3004

Teachers or other church/school leaders come forward during the song; pastor may introduce them and ask where they will serve.

BLESSING

Church education leader, elder, or pastor: As followers of Christ, we are lifelong learners called to be disciples. Some are gifted by the Spirit to serve as teachers and others as leaders, nurturing the faith of others. We now bless you for your ministry with this church. Do you believe that God has called you to this ministry, and do you trust God to equip you for this task?

Teachers/leaders: I do.

Church education leader, elder, or pastor: Will you seek to remain faithful by depending on God's grace and growing closer to God through prayer, Bible study, and worship?

Teachers/leaders: I will.

Church education leader: Please stand if you are able, as together we bless these teachers and leaders:

Congregation: Gracious God, you are the source of knowledge and the giver of faith. Thank you for calling these servants of yours to strengthen the faith of others. Bless them and lead them to depend on your grace, to walk with your Spirit, and to seek wisdom for the journey. Through Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

HYMN

GOD OF ALL LEARNING

Gillette

CHILDREN'S TIME

Children may come forward with their backpacks; older children may want to remain seated; ZOOM viewers may respond as children!

Did you bring your backpack with you today? Can you show me?

(children show backpacks)

How are you feeling about starting a new year at school?

(allow time for responses; unmute if on Zoom)

Thank you for telling me how you feel.

Going back to school can cause many feelings, and those feelings are different for everyone.

Whether you are starting school for the first time, moving to a new school, or staying at the same school can be both exciting and scary. Even the big kids (in COS) get a little nervous when a new school year starts, and that's okay!

(before the service, ask any older kids if they would share their feelings)

The good news is that God is always with us, no matter where we go or how we feel.

As we start a new school year, we want to bless you and your backpacks and give you something to tie on your backpack or put inside, so that when you look at them you will remember God's love is always with you, no matter what! So, let's sing a song and then Bless the backpacks and you!

(backpack tags may be distributed after the Blessing of Backpacks)

HYMN

JESUS LOVES ME

UMH 191, verse 1

Singing as children return to their seats

BLESSING OF THE CHILDREN & BACKPACKS

(church leader and child may read these parts)

Leader: Today, we have before us backpacks that will be carried to and from school by the children and youth.

Some days, so much stuff will fill these backpacks that the students may find it difficult to walk.

Other days, they will be light and nearly empty. But on each and every day, these backpacks represent hard work. Today we offer these blessings for the work and joy of learning.

Child or youth: We come here ready to receive your blessings and we commit ourselves to study and learning in the school year ahead. We ask your blessing on each of us.

A blessing is something you receive, so you may open your hands and receive this blessing as if it is a gift.

Gracious God, we lift to you today these students and these backpacks:

ALL: May these backpacks (and tags) remind you that God is always with you. As you sit and as you stand, as you learn and as you play, may you know God, your friend, is always there loving you and blessing you every day of this school year.

May you always know that you are a blessing and that God loves you in school and in the world. As you carry these backpacks, may you be reminded of the love and care of this congregation. **We pray for all the teachers, administrators and staff in our schools. May they be surrounded by God's blessing and supported by our prayers as they respond to the call of serving in our schools. We pray all this in the name of our teacher and friend, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

(Following the blessing, students may receive tags and/or backpacks.)

SONG Lord, I Lift Your Name on High TFWS 2088

CLOSING BLESSING

Now, go out into this beautiful world that God has made,

Go and play!

Go and learn!

Go and love as God loves!

May you be filled with loving kindness for yourself and others,

And may the prayers of this community keep you safe, healthy, and full of joy.

Amen.

POSTLUDE I'm Gonna Sing UMH 333

SOURCES:

Illustrated Ministry: <https://attachments.convertkitcdn.com/35894/f15cfe0d-95a9-4051-8902-df367a189dcf/BacktoSchool-Liturgy.pdf>

Adapted from methodistchurch.org.uk (Methodist Church, UK) by Revd Alice Goodman in Fulbourn (Ely Diocese) and Margaret Pritchard Houston (Children's Adviser, St Albans).

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/god-of-all-learning#>