

Blessing of the Backpacks and Back-to-School WORSHIP LITURGY



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— MINISTRY —



Blessing of the Backpacks and Back-to-School Worship Liturgy

As we get ready to return to school, we wanted to provide you with not only a Blessing of the Backpacks, but also additional components for a Back-to-School worship service. This resource includes a Call to Worship, Opening Prayer, Blessing of the Backpacks, Prayers of the People, Closing Prayer, and a Benediction. As you plan your Blessing of the Backpacks this year, we hope this resource will ease your planning. If you'd like to share this resource with friends and colleagues, please share this link with them: <http://illstrtdm.in/BackToSchool>

We hope you enjoy this free resource. If you have any questions, you can reach us at info@illustratedministry.com. If you want to connect with others and see how they are using our resources, you can follow us on social media:

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Our Facebook Group is a growing community. If you're looking for ideas and suggestions for using this resource, you can request to join here:
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CALL TO WORSHIP

ONE: Calling all children of the Living God:
the gospel is good news for every age and every stage.

ALL: Let us worship together, the young and the old.

ONE: The good news is proclaimed in God's words,
and also with crayons, silly songs, snacks, and rest time.

ALL: Let us worship together, every generation.

ONE: We come together with different abilities and disabilities,
learning in a rainbow of ways and styles.

ALL: Let us worship together, with our family of faith.

ONE: All are welcome in the arms of Christ who proclaimed, "Let the children come!"

ALL: Let us worship together, united in our eternal hope.

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray:

God our teacher, who helps us to understand the world around us,

Thank you for the privilege of education. You have blessed our communities with teachers who take new skills and concepts and pass them along to each new class of young people.

God who came as a child to show us how to be fully human, to show us how to be children of God,

You have given our children minds that grow and develop in unique ways, at unique speeds, and we are astounded by that miracle.

You speak to us through the words, actions, play, and feelings of children. You call us to listen to the Spirit speaking through our young siblings in Christ.

We celebrate the beginning of this school year and ask for your blessings upon the children, the educators, and the families who support them all.

But in this celebration of education and learning, we do not forget there are children and families and teachers who do not have the resources they need. When systems are unjust, the outcomes are unacceptable. Today we remember those who are beginning school this year: those who have what they need to learn and grow in safety, and those who lack supplies, teachers, safe buildings, and accommodations for all needs and abilities.

We come to worship together, to lift up our young people and all those who care for them and teach them. Open our hearts to what you are saying to us today.

Amen.

BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS

Gathering:

Before reading through the blessing, invite kids to bring their backpacks and gather around you. Or, if gathering virtually, invite kids to sit with their backpacks in front of their screen. You may choose to follow the script below, create your own, or skip it altogether.

Here are some suggestions to help kids identify and share their feelings during the gathering questions:

- **Move your thumbs:** Kids can use one, or both, thumbs to share how they feel. They can use any combination of thumbs-up (good), thumbs-down (not good), in between (okay), or all around (a little bit of everything).
- **Raise your hand:** This is a great way to expand a child's feelings vocabulary and help them see they're not alone in what they feel. Begin by saying, "Raise your hand if you feel (fill in the blank)" then give space for kids to raise their hands. Repeat a few times with different feelings.
- **Share your voice:** Empower kids to identify and share their feelings with their own words and images. If appropriate to your context, encourage them to expand on vague and straightforward feelings like "good" or "okay."

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

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

(Allow time for their responses.)

Thank you for being brave and sharing how you feel.

Going back to school always invites big feelings to come along with us, and those feelings can be different for everyone! Whether you're starting school for the first time, moving to a new school, or staying at the same school, we can all feel happy, nervous, scared, curious, _____ (insert any other emotion). Sometimes, we can even feel all those feelings at the same time, and that's okay!

But did you know God is always with us? No matter where we go and what we feel?

As we start a new year at school, I want to give you this special backpack tag so that whenever you look at it, you can remember God loves you and is always with you, no matter what.

Passing Out the Tags:

You may choose to read the following blessing over each child as you give them a tag, or you may choose to pass out all the tags at once and speak this blessing over everyone at the same time.

_____ (NAME), this school year, may you be curious and kind, gentle and strong, brave and loving.

Sharing the Blessing:

Along with the backpack tag, I also want to share a blessing with you. A blessing is something that you receive, so can you open your hands like you are ready to receive a special gift?

As I speak, imagine the words are dancing, floating, and fluttering all around, and watch them as they land on your hands and on your backpack. If you want to receive it, take the blessing and put it in your heart.

May these tags remind you that God is always with you. As you sit and as you stand, as you learn and as you play, in every fear and every celebration, may you know God, your friend, is always there.

Praying for the School Year:

You may also choose to include this prayer to wrap up your blessing of the backpacks.

God of fresh starts and new beginnings,
we bring ourselves, our big feelings, and our backpacks to you.

In our backpacks, we carry blank pages, sharpened pencils, and pointy crayons,
and in our hearts, we carry big feelings, unanswered questions, and hopeful expectations.
There are endless possibilities of what this new year might bring—
of what we might learn, who we might meet, and who we might become.

God, our friend who is always with us, be with us through it all.

Be with us as we ride the bus.
Be with us as we walk.
Be with us as we buckle seat belts, zip-up jackets, and tie shoes.
However we get there, and whatever we wear,
bless this journey into something new.

For the grown-ups going back to school,
With-Us God, be with them too.
Thank you for our teachers, helpers, caregivers, and leaders,
and for all they do to help us learn and grow.

God, our friend who's full of wonder, fill their hearts and bless their hands.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

ONE: With you, every transition and new start is a reminder of your goodness, for you are always creating fresh, amazing things in us and through us. Though we are sad about the summer ending, we are grateful for this school year. We appreciate the opportunity to learn and grow, knowing it is one of the biggest privileges we have. With thanks and love, we now offer everything we are to you, asking for your blessing.

ONE: We pray as and for students of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. We pray for our hearts and all they hold—excitement and nervousness, disappointment and hope. We give you all our loves and fears. We pray for steady self-esteem and deepening resilience.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We pray for our minds, that they will expand in wonder and celebration, learning not just from the books studied but the people beside us. Open our minds with a willingness to be changed in unexpected ways, and settle our thought loops in peaceful places.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We pray for our hands, that they will reach out to help welcome and care. Bless our hands with patience and dedication as they grip pencils and type on keyboards, swish paint brushes and clap in song, grip monkey bars and lunch box handles, spin wheelchair tires and basketballs.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We pray for our mouths, that they will speak words bringing life and connection. Help us use our mouths to honor the dignity and belovedness of all. Remind us to open our mouths for deep belly breaths when we're feeling anxious or afraid.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We pray for our feet, that they will move toward those different from us and help others in safe ways. Plant our feet next to those who feel alone, and bless our steps down hallways and sidewalks. We know you are with us wherever our feet go or stay.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We pray for our eyes, that they may see ourselves and others with compassion. Point our eyes toward those who are forgotten or struggling. Grow us in flexibility to see from all kinds of angles. Bless what and how we see, whether we're looking at a screen, a whiteboard, or the beauty of a person's face. And help us see with the most important eyes—the eyes of the Spirit within us.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We pray for our ears, that they will genuinely listen to all voices, especially those that haven't been listened to much. When things get noisy, help us listen extra carefully for your voice. Help us hear with the most important ears—the ears of the Spirit within us.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We say a special prayer for parents, as the start of a new school year is always another leap of faith. Wrap them with your reassuring love as they entrust their children and trust in you. When questions remain unanswered, and the realm of control is finite, bless them with peace and the promise you are right there with their child, whether heading to preschool or driving to college.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We also pray now for teachers, staff and administrators. Bless these faithful servants with courage and confidence, knowing you are in their classroom with a steady hand on their shoulder. Give them peace, patience, and balance in the pressures they face, and bravery to build structures and systems which justly serve all your children. Give them delight in the young ones before them, and recognition of the sweet ways children are also teachers.

ALL: *Loving God, hold us and our prayers.*

ONE: We pray for health and wholeness, fun and growth, surprise and amazement, for this school year ahead, knowing you will hold us all the way through.

ALL: We thank you, God, and love you. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God,
Coat the year before us with miracles
of your mercy and strength,
and help us appreciate most of all
the bedrock miracle of your presence with us
in every single ordinary, sacred moment.
Lead us this school year into life-giving rhythms of grace and light,
where our regular routines become
the framework for worship and blessing.
Amen.

BENEDICTION

Children, families, and all who love them,
go out into the beautiful world that God has made!
Go and play!
Go and learn!
Go and love others!
May you be filled with lovingkindness for yourself and everyone around you.
May the prayers of your faith community keep you safe, healthy, and full of joy.
Amen.



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