



Starting School in Australia

Intergenerational worship for the beginning of the school year

Milestones are significant moments in life. Churches can play a role in the observance of milestones. We think immediately of birth, marriage and bereavement. But there are many others. Starting school is such a milestone.

Children today may slip into school gradually, moving through playgroup, day care, kindergarten and other programs that ease the trauma of 'the first day of school'. But it's still a significant day in the life of a child and the child's family. The start of each school year is a milestone in the life of school children, youth and adults engaged in study and teaching — and their families.

A worship service in which congregations recognise and bless children at the start of the school year is a wonderful way of bringing together people of all ages. Children feel valued and important. Parents feel supported and encouraged. Adults who do not have school-age children feel involved in the lives of the children of the congregation and community.

The start of the school year can be a model of the new beginnings we all receive through God's grace and forgiveness.

Our school year in Australia generally begins right after the Australia Day long weekend. That's the weekend when families like to enjoy their last days of freedom from the school year (and church) routine. That freedom often means going away for a weekend holiday. So *why* should a congregation plan a special service to bless students at the start of the school year, or, for some, the start of their school career? *How* can a congregation do it?

- Some just do it. On the Sunday before the school term begins, they pray for the children who are there and those who are not there. They present a gift to the children who are there and have someone take a gift to the children who are away on the Sunday.
- Some hold a start-of-school event the first Sunday after the start of the school term, blessing the people who have begun school in the past week.
- Some attempt to create a culture where the Church is a significant part of the life of families in the days before school starts. They organise a start-of-school service, participate in their community's Australia Day celebrations and hold special family events that link the two observances.
- Some see the event as the launch of their school term children's ministry program.

This resource is designed to help congregations celebrate the milestone of the start of school in an Australia Day context.

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MODEL WORSHIP SERVICE

UPSIZING & DOWNSIZING

This service can be used in large or small congregations. It can also be used in a home setting.

Each planning group will need to adapt the ideas to suit their own particular situation: the people and the facilities.

USING THIS RESOURCE

These notes have been prepared by the Resource Centre for Children's and Family Ministry of the Uniting Church (SA) to help congregations plan a special worship for people of all ages.

You may make as many copies of the notes as needed for your worship planners and leaders.

The use of music and other copyright elements is not covered in this permission.

Read through all the material. Discuss it as a planning team. You may use any of the ideas that are appropriate in your situation or you may use the entire sample service.

If you use the resource, we would appreciate your letting us know what you do. Send a brief email to rccfm@bigpond.com

For other intergenerational worship ideas see <http://mrn.sa.uca.org.au> Click on 'Helps', then 'Children's Ministry', then 'All Age Worship'.

ALL-AGE WORSHIP

Worship is an encounter between God and God's people; a dialogue in which God speaks and people respond, both in the worship service and in their lives.

All worship is inter-generational. The worshipers represent different generations. They have been shaped by previous generations and are shaping future generations.

Intentionally intergenerational worship:

- allows this dialogue to take place in a variety of ways
- focuses on a simple theme and connects that theme with the lives of the worshipers
- provides worshipers (young and old) with an experience they can remember and talk about in their homes
- uses movement and the senses as much as possible in the experience
- encourages interaction and dialogue among people of the various generations
- takes seriously the understanding that people of all ages worship together in the body of Christ. People of all ages can also plan worship, invite people to worship, and lead worship
- recognises and values the children present in the worshipping congregation and 'the child within' each adult.

WORSHIP PLANNING

An all-age worship service is best planned by an intergenerational team, working with the pastor/minister/priest or lay ministry team. If possible the planning team should consist of at least three people: representing the youngest third, the middle third and the oldest third of the congregation.

The team may also draw on people who have special abilities, eg in the areas of hospitality, music, drama, visual arts and technology.

Planning as an intergenerational team can be a valuable experience for all involved.

Suggested planning steps:

1. Begin with prayer, and trust God's Spirit to guide your planning.
2. Consider how the theme relates to people in your congregation and community.
3. Look through these notes to see how they can help in planning the kind of service you want to hold.
4. Use these notes and your regular worship format to develop a worship outline.
5. Flesh out the outline; consider your own people and facilities.
6. Work with worship leaders to plan details: who does what, when and how?

INVITATION AND ADVERTISING

The first people to notify about your service are the members of your congregation. If possible, begin before your Christmas break to let them in on the excitement of what is being planned. Encourage them to catch the vision of the intergenerational start-of-school worship event (and any family event linked with it).

Encourage grandparents and godparents of children who do not worship regularly to see this as an opportunity to organize a special weekend with their child/children.

Invite children 'graduating' from your playgroup or other program for preschoolers.

It's a good idea to prepare an invitational flyer about the Starting School service and distribute it to families who attend your Christmas service and other special Christmas activities.

You may want to extend the invitation to the event to others in the community. Be sure to include the date, time and location of the service in all of your promotional material.

You may have the opportunity to work with your local school and distribute invitations when the school has its registration and distribution of school supplies.

WORSHIP SPACE & VISUALS

A clean, tidy and attractive worship area can help guests and regular worshipers feel that this is an inviting place to be.

Call on people with technical and artistic skills to create an atmosphere that supports the theme of the service.

Both the Australia Day theme and the Start of School theme provide lots of scope for special decoration of the worship space.

If most of your children attend the same school, the school may be able to lend you a school flag or school posters.

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is basically the art of helping people — especially visitors — feel comfortable in your church 'home'. It would be good for the planning team to consider questions like:

- Is there anything about this building that would make a visiting child/family uncomfortable? If so, how can we make it more hospitable?
- Is there anything about the way we worship that would make a visiting child/family uncomfortable? If so, how can we make it more hospitable?
- Is there anything about the way members of this congregation relate to one another that would make a visiting child/family uncomfortable? If so, how can we be more hospitable?

Hospitality is the responsibility of all members of the congregation. But people who invite and bring guests and your designated hospitality team have special responsibility for looking after the guests.

In a service like this one with special emphasis on worshiping as children and families, your hospitality team (and your planning team) need to be aware of the people who may be marginalised by this approach: some teens and young adults, singles, families with no children, people who are experiencing family problems and people who worship alone.

WORSHIP LEADERS

The sample service requires:

- A **WORSHIP LEADER** who serves as host (or compere) leading worshipers through the service. The role of Worship Leader can be taken by a minister and/or layperson; an individual or two people.

- A **MUSIC TEAM/SONG LEADER** who encourage and lead congregational singing along with instrumentalists and other vocalists.
- A **BIBLE READER** (or several readers of different ages) who reads the texts directly from the Bible.
- A **PRAYER LEADER** (one or several people of different ages) who prepare and lead prayers.

MUSIC

Most of the music in the service will be congregational singing. All worshipers are invited to participate. However some people may not be familiar with — or comfortable with — the practice of congregational singing. Invite people to join in the singing when they are comfortable doing so, or just to listen.

Your regular instrumentalists (organist, band) lead/accompany the singing. Small congregations, or congregations that do not have strong musical leadership, may sing with CDs or other electronic music. Display song words in your usual manner.

Include traditional hymns as well as more contemporary songs and songs written with children in mind.

When using the more adult songs, explain or illustrate briefly any obscure images or language. Consider ways of involving children who are too young to read or sing the words, eg

- teach Auslan symbols or other actions for some key words in the song and ask everyone to do the actions when they come to the words in the song. For a dictionary of Auslan signs, see www.auslan.org.au
- teach one or two lines that are repeated in the chorus and give a cue when everyone can join in singing these lines
- if you use the Jesus-loves-me folded paper game, children can operate it in time with the music.

SONG SUGGESTIONS

- *Jesus loves me, this I know* is the featured song in the sample service (see page 7).
- You may use the Australian national anthem and add the following verse:
*With Christ our head and cornerstone,
we'll build our nation's might
Whose way and truth and light alone,
can guide our path aright.
Our lives, a sacrifice of love*

*reflect our Master's care,
With faces turned to heaven above,
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.*

(Author unknown. The verse was used during the Global March for Jesus in 1998 and at World Youth Day 2008.)

- Get creative: make up your own song about starting school. Here's an example, but you can do better:

Important things

(Sing to the tune of 'My Favourite Things' from *The Sound of Music*)

(1) *Lunch box and recess
and sun hat and back pack;
books, pencils, biros,
and fresh-covered notebooks:*

*everything carefully marked with your name:
these are all important starting-school things.*

(2) *English, math'matics,
design and technology,
science, arts, languages, health and phys ed,
society and our environment:
these are important things to learn at school.*

(3) *Co-operation and respect and fairness,
integrity, which is honestly living,
responsibility and excellence.
these are the values you practice at school.*

(Chorus) *But there's one thing to remember,
more important than the rest:
that Jesus loves you and he's with you.
Trust Jesus and you'll be blessed.*

SERMON

A sermon in an all-age worship service should be an all-age sermon.

This means it's short and simple — generally no more than three points. Stories, illustrations and dialogue can be helpful.

It's good to follow the adage: first tell people what you are going to say, say it, then tell them what you said. If you do each step in a different, engaging way, people of all ages are likely to remember the message.

If an adults-only sermon is used, you will need to organize an activity for children to do during the sermon.

SOMETHING TO TAKE HOME

You can extend the impact of an all-age worship service by giving worshipers a 'souvenir'— something tangible to take home with them. The item can be a starting point for family discussion of what happened during the worship service.

The sample service suggests making, taking home and using at home a Jesus-Loves-Me folded origami game. See page 8.

REHEARSAL

Because this service will be different from your usual service, it requires careful planning. It also requires rehearsal. A complete walk-through will pinpoint any logistical problems, allow the worship leader/s to fine-tune instructions for the worshipers and ensure that the service itself runs smoothly.

Many congregations find it best to schedule their rehearsal in conjunction with a band or choir practice.

Use rehearsal time as an opportunity to pray together.

- Thank God that you, as a team, have the privilege of leading people in worship.
- Ask God to bring people to worship who will be blessed by hearing the good news of Jesus' love for them.
- Ask God to be with all who worship with you.
- Ask God to accept your planning and worship leading as acts of love and service to him.
- Ask God to bless your efforts and to work through what you do and say — for his glory and the benefit of all worshipers.

VALUES IN EDUCATION

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years about values in education. Children entering school today will be entering an environment charged with promoting values that are commonly accepted in Australian culture, eg

- **Co-operation** (explained in some literature as: constructively thinking, working and learning together, valuing the uniqueness of each individual, being capable of uniting cohesively as a community and recognising local and global connections)
- **Excellence** (being innovative, creative and responsive in the way we think, act and learn, expanding our capability to achieve appropriate quality outcomes and success by meeting and overcoming challenges)
- **Fairness** (acting without bias and recognising that the causes of inequity can be changed by behaving in a way that leads to equitable outcomes)
- **Integrity** (consistently applying moral and principled behaviour, which reflects trust and honesty)
- **Respect** (honouring and considering others and treating them with dignity, empathy, esteem and courtesy)

- **Responsibility** (applying accountability and strategically leading, planning and managing for today with tomorrow in mind)

Although they are expressed here in corporate-type language, these values are seen as the base values of the Australian community. Most parents have been inculcating these same values in their children since birth and want the school system to continue and support this aspect of development.

What do these values have to do with our faith?

Australian Christians would endorse these values and encourage everyone to embrace them for their own good and the good of the community. There is nothing in this list of values that Christians cannot accept.

Christians also recognise that human beings on their own will never live by these values perfectly. The Good News we cling to is that we have a loving God who forgives us when we fail and whose Spirit helps us to live by the values we profess.

PAUL, THE COLLOSSIANS & AUSSIE VALUES

There are some striking parallels between the values Paul urges in his letter to the Colossians and the values promoted in Australian Schools.

What Paul writes, however, is undergirded by the Good News of Jesus Christ:

(1:13,14) For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

CO-OPERATION Paul begins his letter in the context of co-operation with his fellow workers and the people to whom he is writing.

(1:1,2) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse.

Paul gives a model of co-operation

(3:15) Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

... and guidelines for living co-operatively
(3:12-14) Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

EXCELLENCE Paul urged excellence.

(3:23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.

(4:5) Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

(4:12) Epaphras ... is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Paul gives a particularly Christian dimension to excellence:

(1:9-12) ... since the day we heard about you,

we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

(1:28) We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

FAIRNESS Paul assumed God's justice.

(3:25) Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism.

... and urges fairness in human relationships

(4:1) Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

INTEGRITY For Paul, integrity is living in the faith and forgiveness received from Jesus..

(2:6-8) So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

(3:8,9) But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices

RESPECT Paul outlines respect in family and employment situations.

(3:18-21) Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

RESPONSIBILITY Paul ends his letter by giving responsibility to others and reminding them of the responsibility they have received from God.

(4:16-18) After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Bible Quotations from Colossians in the New International Version. In addition to these specific quotations, you can find the same values undergirding the entire letter.

JESUS LOVES ME

The most valuable thing we can give a child to take with them as they enter school for the first time; or any person as they approach any new situation is the truth contained in the song 'Jesus Loves Me' by Anna Warner.

1. Jesus loves me! This I know
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong;
they are weak but He is strong.
2. Jesus loves me! He who died
Heaven's gate to open wide.
He will wash away my sin,
let His little child come in.
3. Jesus loves me! He will stay
close beside me all the way.
He's prepared a home for me
and some day His face I'll see.



**Anna Bartlett Warner
(1827-1915)**

Anna Warner wrote the poem with her sister Susan. It was part of their best-selling novel *Say and Seal*. In the book, the character Mr.

Linden says these words to comfort a dying child. Johnny Fox.

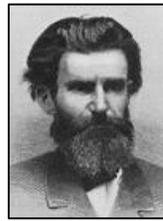
In the story the poem includes an additional verse:

4. Jesus loves me! Loves me still
tho' I'm very weak and ill,
that I might from sin be free
bled and died upon the tree.

The Warner sisters were from a prosperous American family. As children they worked and played together and developed talents for storytelling. As adults both earned their living as novelists writing individually and also in collaboration. They also invented a popular educational game 'Robinson Crusoe's Farmyard', played with coloured cards painted by the sisters.

They lived close to the West Point Military academy and held Sunday school classes in their home for academy cadets. Anna loved writing hymns and wrote a fresh one each month for her students.

Anna (who sometimes used the pseudonym, Amy Lathrop) published 'Jesus Loves Me' as a hymn in her first hymnbook, *Original Hymns*.



**William Batchelder Bradbury
(1816-1868)**

William Bradbury was a church musician and composer of Gospel songs. He composed the music for many well-known hymns

including 'He leadeth me; 'Just as I am', Saviour like a shepherd lead us' and 'Sweet hour of prayer'.

Bradbury created a style of children's music that swept the country and set the pattern for his successors in Sunday-school song writing.

He was in charge of the choir and organ of the Baptist Tabernacle in New York City and started a singing class for children. As many as 600 children took part in annual 'Juvenile Music Festivals' held at the tabernacle.

In 1862, Bradbury came across the words of Warner's poem and wrote his own tune and the chorus we sing today:

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

'Jesus Loves Me' became the best-loved spiritual song in the world. It has been translated into more languages than any other song. Missionaries appreciate its simple and easy-to-remember chorus as a means of explaining the gospel in a clear, simple way.



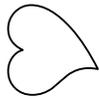
**Dr Karl Barth
1886-1968**

Karl Barth is considered one of the most brilliant intellectuals, theologians, scholars, writers and teachers of the twentieth century.

Once a student asked Barth to could sum up what was most important about his life's work and theology. Barth thought for a moment and then smiled, "Yes, in the words of a song my mother used to sing me, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

A colourful multifold leaflet that opens to a banner with the words 'Jesus loves me' is available from Lutheran Tract Mission (tracts@lll.org.au, (08) 8360 7200).

me



Jesus loves me!
this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong.
They are weak
but he is strong.

2



Jesus loves me!
He who died
Heaven's gate to open wide;
He will wash away my sin
Let his little child
come in.

Jesus loves me!
He will stay
close beside me all the way.
He's prepared a home for me
and some day
his face
I'll see.



3

loves

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
The Bible tells me
so.

Jesus



JESUS-LOVES-ME GAME



Adults may remember the origami paper folding technique as a bug (or, unfortunately, 'cootie') catcher.

Cut along the dotted line to form an exact square. Fold according to origami instructions. Use your search engine to find instructions on the Internet. There's a step-by-step demo on YouTube.

AUSTRALIA DAY

Australia Day, 26 January, is the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet of eleven convict ships from Great Britain, and the raising of the Union Jack at Sydney Cove by Captain Arthur Phillip, in 1788.

According to the Australia Day web site (www.austaliaday.com): On Australia Day we come together as a nation to

- celebrate what's great about Australia and being Australian,
- reflect on what we have achieved and what we can be proud of in our great nation
- re-commit to making Australia an even better place for the future.

26 January is also observed as **Survival Day** a day to acknowledge and celebrate the survival of Indigenous peoples and cultures.

The celebration of Australia Day is driven by local communities. Consider being a part of your community's observation of Australia Day, participating in community events or organizing events for/with others in the community, eg

- Invite Aboriginal members of your community to share their stories with your young people.
- As a group attend an Australia Day concert. Organise a picnic for families before or after such events.
- Take part in an Australia Day parade.
- If your community has a Citizenship ceremony on the day, volunteer to host the event, or provide a special welcome gift for new Australian children and families.
- Recognition is given on Australia Day to an 'Australian of the Year' and other outstanding individuals and events. You might nominate and honour your own 'Special people of the Year' — possibly teachers.
- The official Clean Up Australia Day a month away (7 March 2010), but you could get into the positive clean-up mode by helping to clean the parade route or event venue before or after the event.

Go to www.austaliaday.com and click on 'toolkit' for lots of other great ideas and resources.

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Most schools have a well-developed orientation program for new students. Often children starting school this year will have visited the school the previous year. Parents are generally given some orientation as well about what is expected of them.

You might consult with parents of children who began school in the last year or two and see if there are any gaps in the orientation that you as a congregation could help to fill.

You might organise a morning tea and chat for empty-nest parents who have left their kids at school for the first time.

BEYOND THE FIRST DAY

The Adelaide Advertiser (10 December, 2009) highlighted the results of the national report 'A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia'. The findings were that nationally one in four children starting school are not up to scratch in the key developmental areas of physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication skills.

Your local school may be able to let you know of ways your congregation can support families who need special assistance, eg help with language or transportation.



Starting School in Australia

A SAMPLE SERVICE

Spoken 'script' is in *italic*, comments and instructions are in plain type.

Decorate the front of the church with school backpacks, school uniforms and other items children need to take to school.

1. ARRIVAL ACTIVITY

As people arrive, the hospitality team greets them and directs them to a work area where families can make Jesus-Loves-Me games (see page 8) — one for each child and extras for families who do not have primary-school aged children.

Be sure to have several people on hand to help people with the folding.

2. ENTRY

Families/children bring their folded games into church, where the hospitality team gives them any materials they need for the service and helps them find suitable seats.

As people enter, a CD of Australian bush mood music is playing and slides of Australian scenes are projected on a screen.

3. WELCOME & INVOCATION

WORSHIP LEADER: *Welcome to this special celebration of Australia Day and the start of a new school year.*

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, and recognise the important role indigenous people continue to play within our community and our nation.

But most important, we are here to worship God — the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — in this great southland of the Holy Spirit.

Let's begin with a song.

4. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing 'The great South-land, version 2' (Bullock) or another song with an Australian theme.

5. PRAYER FOR AUSTRALIA

PRAYER LEADER (a young person): *Let's pray for our nation, Australia.*

Dear God, you brought us to this country in many different ways. May we grow in appreciation and reverence for your gift of

this great land. May we value our fauna and flora, and above all, learn to value each other. May we experience forgiveness from each other and reach out in friendship and peace. May we learn to forgive ourselves for the prejudices of the past, and work towards a nation of welcome for all.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

(based on 'An Australian blessing' E Pike, 1997, © Murri Ministry ACM Brisbane)

6. SCHOOL STORIES

WORSHIP LEADER: *The start of a new school year is an important time. Some of you here may be going to school for the very first time. Some of you may be starting a new school. Some of you will be going back to the same school.*

Some of you went to school a long time ago, but you still remember some important things from your school days.

[Names] are going to tell us the most important things they remember about school.

Three people (an older person, a middle-aged person and a young adult) each tells something important they remember doing or learning at school. The anecdotes should be brief and possibly humorous.

It would be good if one of the speakers tells about morning assembly when they saluted the flag and sang the national anthem and another tells about some 'rules' from their school days.

If possible project photos of the speakers with their school classes during the stories.

This segment could be presented like a TV talk show with someone interviewing the 'panel'.

WORSHIP LEADER: *Thanks, folks. Those are great memories. I wonder if the students going to school this year will have similar experiences.*

7. FIRST BIBLE READING

WORSHIP LEADER: *Schools have rules to keep everyone safe and to keep things running smoothly. Communities have laws. Australia has a constitution and laws.*

A long time ago God gave his people laws for living his good life. It was so important for people to know God's laws, that he told parents to talk about them wherever they walked with their children, and write them as decoration on their homes.

We know the summary of God's laws as the Ten Commandments. Some of you may know all ten of them off by heart.

BIBLE READER: *Look at your folded-paper toy. Find the picture of Jesus. Jesus is the most important person who ever lived.*

Once, some people came to Jesus and asked him which of God's laws (or commandments) was the most important.

If you know how to read, please read with me Jesus' answer to that question. The rest of you just look at your picture of Jesus and listen:

Mark 12: 29-31 (NIV)

'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these'

8. SECOND BIBLE READING

BIBLE READER: *Jesus was such an important person that people kept asking him questions.*

One day, someone asked him, 'Who is the most important person in God's kingdom?'

Listen to what he did and said:

Matthew 18:2,3 (NIRV)

Jesus called a little child over to him. He had the child stand among them. Jesus said, "What I'm about to tell you is true. You need to change and become like little children. If you don't, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

9. BLESSING OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

WORSHIP LEADER OR MINISTER/PASTOR/PRIEST: *If Jesus thought children were that important, it's fitting that we take time to honour children at this special time of their year.*

Children, the picture on your folded-paper game shows Jesus blessing some children.

Now we would like to bless you, too. That means we're going to ask God to be with you and keep you safe and secure.

Call the names of children among you who are starting school for the first time and ask them to stand. Or invite parents (or other adults who are with the children) to introduce them, eg 'This is my son Ethan, he will be starting Year 1 at Springfield Primary on Tuesday'.

We also want to bless all the children here who are returning to school this year. Will you please stand.

Parents/carers, please put your hands on your children's heads as I speak the blessing.

Those of you who do not have school children with you, please join one of these family groups for the blessing.

Blessing of children

Dear God, we ask you to be with each of these children as they go to school. Calm any fears or anxiousness they may be feeling. Keep them safe. Bless them with many friends and good teachers. May school be exciting, fun, and provide them with good learning so that they can grow up to love and serve you and others. Amen.

Children, can you please put your hands on your grown-ups' heads as we say a blessing for them, too.

Blessing of Parents

Dear God, bless the adults who care for these children with peace and the certainty that you keep their children safe and secure. Give them wisdom, patience, and an abundant measure of love, so that they can continue to raise their children well and pass on the faith that you have given them. Amen.

You may return to your seats and we'll sing another song.

10. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing 'God gives' (Boudier) (*All Together Again* #109) or another children's worship song.

11. IMPORTANT THINGS TO TAKE TO SCHOOL

WORSHIP LEADER draws people's attention to the items of school equipment on display at the front of the church. Identify each item and why it is important and helpful for school children to take these things with them to school.

We've got something even more important for you to take to school. It's not something you can carry in your backpack or hold in your hands. It's something to know in your head and your heart — Jesus loves you.

12. THIRD BIBLE READING

BIBLE READER: The Bible tells us that Jesus loves us. And it tells us all that we need to know about who this Jesus who loves us really is.

In the Bible there's a letter from a missionary to some people he had been telling about Jesus.

Listen to what Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NIRV)

What I received I passed on to you. And it is the most important of all. Here is what it is. Christ died for our sins, just as Scripture said he would.

He was buried.

He was raised from the dead on the third day, just as Scripture said he would be.

13. SONG

WORSHIP LEADER OR SONG LEADER: *It's good to know that Jesus, the most important person who ever lived, will be going with you to school. Jesus is also the person who loves you more than anyone else — even your family. We're going to sing a song about Jesus' love.*

Parents, if your children are too young to read the words, direct them to the picture on their folded Jesus-loves-me game.

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing an upbeat version of *Jesus loves me, this I know*.

14. SERMON: AUSSIE VALUES

See page 5 for more about Aussie values.

MINISTER/PRIEST/PASTOR presents a sermon as interactively as possible.

The sermon theme can focus on the value of 'integrity' and the importance of living our lives as students, parents, workers, community members in a way that reflects Jesus' love.

OR the sermon can look briefly at all six values.

When we go to school we learn about a lot of skills (like reading and writing and measuring).

We also learn some things called values — values are the ideas and ideals we consider so important that we use them to help us make choices about how we live.

Our schools have identified some values as being truly Australian values and are finding ways to help children know and live by these values.

I think it's helpful to know that those values are similar to the values in the Bible.

The key words can be displayed on the screen as they are discussed.

- Co-operation
- Excellence
- Fairness
- Integrity
- Respect
- Responsibility

Small groups of children (or intergenerational groups) could be prepared to give their own interpretation of each value, either as a skit, a piece of artwork, or a definition.

Australians who are Christians think all of these values are important. But they also know that:

- *God gives us the ability to live by these values.*
- *We don't always live by the values we believe and say are important.*
- *When we don't live by these values, we can come to Jesus (who loves us); tell him we are sorry and want to do better.*
- *Jesus who loves us will forgive us.*

15. CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

The key words can again be projected on a screen during the prayer.

MINISTER/PRIEST/PASTOR (or the people who presented the values earlier) lead this prayer of confession.

Let's talk to Jesus right now.

Dear Jesus we realise that we don't always live by the values we know and say are important.

Co-operation *Sometimes we like to have our own way instead of cooperating.*

Excellence *Sometimes we do a half-hearted job instead of doing the best we can with the gifts and abilities God gives us in the time God gives us.*

Fairness *Sometimes we think we deserve to be treated specially rather than being fair.*

Integrity *Sometimes we say things that are not true and do things that we know are wrong.*

Respect *Sometimes we treat others as less important than ourselves.*

Responsibility *Sometimes we blame other people for our own mistakes and failures. Please forgive us, Jesus, and help us to do better. Help us to believe that you do love us, you do forgive us, and you will help us. Amen.*

MINISTER/PRIEST/PASTOR

I can say with assurance that Jesus loves you and forgives you — because the Bible tells me so.

16. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing 'I'm happy' (Reichert and Klemke) (*All Together Now* #28) or another song of praise.

17. OFFERING

Announce and collect the offering in your usual way. If you have visitors be sure to explain how the offering is being used, and assure people that they do not need to give an offering.

As the offering is collected, the band or another group can perform *Important things* (see page 4) or a song you have written for this occasion.

18. ANNOUNCEMENTS

WORSHIP LEADER makes any needed short announcements.

Include the suggestion that families (particularly those with school-age children) use their 'Jesus-loves-me' games each morning to remind children that Jesus loves them and goes with them through the day. Or families might choose to sing 'Jesus loves me' as a daily prayer before school.

19. PRAYER

PRAYER LEADER/S lead the congregation in general prayers.

- Pick up any concerns mentioned in announcements
- Pray for the nation's concerns of the day.
- Pray for leaders of Australia, your community and your local schools.
- You may conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

20. BENEDICTION

WORSHIP LEADER: *God will keep you safe and secure as you go from here to your homes, your schools, your places of work and recreation. Go in the assurance that Jesus loves you. Amen.*

21. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in repeating 'Jesus loves me, this I know' or singing 'I've got something' (Anon) (*All Together Again* #149) or another song about Jesus' love.