



Christian Formation Celebration Sunday

Worship and Liturgy Suggestions 2024

The Presbyterian Church (USA) planning calendar recognizes a week of Christian Formation in churches and faith communities. This week begins the Sunday after Labor Day, but churches may choose different weeks or split up some of the celebration over several Sundays depending on their church and school calendars. When considering all the ways in which formation happens in our faith communities, we can use this time to kick-off a new program year for Christian education, commission faith formation leaders or start ministries. We encourage you to recognize the importance of Christian Formation and your leaders in worship.

The following worship suggestions are based in part on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for *Year B, Proper 18*. For 2024, Christian Formation Celebration week begins September 8. All resources for Christian Formation week can be found at www.pcusa.org/christianformationweek.

The Scripture passages in the lectionary for this day are: *Proverbs 22:1-2,8-9,22-23, Psalm 125, Isaiah 35:4-7, Psalm 146, James 2:1-17, Mark 7:24-37*. Liturgy ideas at the end of this resource.

Creative Ideas

Table Setting

This is a donation drive for all ages. Before this Sunday, invite the congregation to donate school supplies. Have on hand a few lists for different age groups (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12) so they can purchase appropriately.

Have about ten (or however many you want - enough to fill the space) items in the back of the sanctuary to set the table (paraments, chalice, candles...also backpacks, notebooks, etc.), and enough volunteers for each individual thing.

At the beginning of worship, the communion table should be bare. As the first hymn begins to play, have each person bring their item down and "set the table." If it's a communion Sunday, don't forget the elements! If it's not, then ALL the school supplies! Don't forget fun school supplies, like stickers. Also, expensive things like TI calculators.

Either during the announcements (before the first hymn), or during the invitation to the table, explain that all these supplies will be donated to local schools for students in need.

Bless them all: **Generous God, out of your abundant love you share everything with us. We are grateful that we are able to share with our neighbors. May these school supplies be exactly the thing some child needs to feel equipped, or successful, or to just not stand out. Bring peace upon our neighbors and help us to remember to pray for peace in our schools throughout the year. Amen.**

Closet Clean-out & Crayon Recycling

As we get ready to gear up our Christian Education year, one of the ways your church may do that is through cleaning out old supplies that may be in your Christian Ed closet or rooms. It's always nice to start the year with freshly sharpened pencils and that brand new box of crayons. If your crayon box is looking a little drab this year, consider donating to the National Crayon Recycling Program, <https://nationalcrayonrecycleprogram.org/>

You can also use this time to gather crayons from congregants' personal stashes of crayons or you may begin a relationship with a local school who may want to offload some old crayons. This is also a great intergenerational service project, as the crayons can be sorted into very specific color groups.

Perhaps you would like to have a small wagon that a child or teacher could pull down the central aisle during the presentation of the offering (if your church does so) or have baskets with old crayons in and around the communion table. You may want to color a poster together before you say goodbye to the old crayons or christen the new crayons on a poster people can color in the narthex from Illustrated Ministry (<https://www.illustratedministry.com/products/posters/>) or encourage people to bring in construction paper pictures that are taped together as a communion table parament. If you get an abundance of old crayons, you could also use this as an opportunity to bless your old supplies in worship as they go to new homes.

A Prayer of Dedication for those old crayons may look something like this:

God of new life,
As we say goodbye to our artists' tools,
Who served us well creating pictures
That made it refrigerator doors and bulletin boards
For everyone to see what we create as a community.
We thank you that you give us tools to make things beautiful
So we can learn to color both in and outside the lines.
And we ask that you take these crayons that are broken and worn,
That have their wrappers torn and we no longer can tell who they are,
And we ask that you give them a new life,
A life of expression,
Bringing joy to anyone who holds them
And to anyone who looks upon the beautiful community you are coloring in us.
Amen.

Handprint Prayers

Knowing someone is praying for you is such a wonderful experience. As you begin your Christian Education year, you may also be beginning a school year at an adjacent preschool or other school. One thing you could do is have the preschool children or the children of your church make a handprint on a half a sheet of construction paper and only put their first name at the bottom. Then you can place a prayer on the back of the handprint and give the handprints to adults in the congregation. It is also nice to then have the adults put their handprints on construction paper and put those up on a bulletin board or other displayed area where you explain that these are the people that are praying for the children of the church or preschool.

You can also do this in the opposite direction, where the children are praying for the adults. Or, perhaps you are praying for parents as they send their children to school. Or you can simply pick two groups in your church that would like to pray for one another.

Wordsearch/Bingo

- Bingo Cards - 5 ready-made cards based on Mark 7:24-37 [Scripture Bingo 2024](#)
- Wordsearch - 1 ready-made word search based on Mark 7:24-37 [Word Search 2024](#)
- Use this website to create your own Bingo Cards - <https://www.classtools.net/bingo/>
- Use this website to create your own Wordsearch - <https://www.superteacherworksheets.com/generator-word-search.html>

Liturgy Suggestions

Opening Prayer

Based on Psalm 125

God of embrace,
Surround us as you have always surrounded your people.
And remind us that your foundation is always sure,
A grounding force of merciful strength,
That does not leave us on shifting sand.
For we gather today in the shadow of your mountains,
Which is far more glorious than a moment where you are not near,
And we will learn to draw near to our neighbor and you draw near to us.
Amen.

Call to Worship

One: Jesus came casting out demons, feeding the hungry, loving the people.

All: He taught us how to live.

One: He comes infusing us with grace and peace and hope.

All: He teaches us how to love.

One: He is coming to perfect this world.

All: He will praise God's holy name with us.

One: Let us together worship the one who gives us all life.

All: Let us worship the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Call to Confession

Friends we come before God with our confessions this day. Not to gain any reward or to be absolved, but only because we desire to repent and live differently. When we admit our wrongs, we turn and begin again. Therefore, in gratitude for God's grace, let us together confession our sins:

Prayer of Confession

God of compassion, we fail to follow your ways each day. We forget that you brought us up in order to care for one another. We deny your calling to be teachers and leaders. We dismiss the people who need us most. And yet you keep calling, you keep hoping, you keep believing in us. Help us, oh God, to be laborers with you. As you have shown us compassion and grace and care, remind us to do the same for all your beloved children. Show us your face in each other and soften our hearts to see it clearly.

Assurance

Beloved in Christ we are free. We are known and loved. We are fully forgiven. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Based on Mark 7:24-37

Surprising God,
As we hear your Word read and proclaimed,
We ask for more than simply an intellectual exercise,
For it is great to have an epiphany,
But your Spirit can heal us by your word
Humble us to hear your story anew
And as we wrestle,
Heal our restless hearts
Amen.

Children's Time

Leader: Start by saying the Lord's Prayer together.

- Ask if they thought that was a weird/funny/odd way to start the children's time.
- Share with them that you opened with that prayer because it's what Jesus taught you to do. And Jesus' whole thing was about helping us learn ways to be faithful, to take care of people, and to pray!
- Explore together some other specific things Jesus taught us?
 - Examples: Matthew 25: feed people, house them, clothe them, etc.
- Ask how they see people around them doing things like Jesus thinks they should? Any good examples in your church or community?
- What do you think is the most important thing Jesus taught us?
 - Love people!
 - Feed people!
 - Dismantle systems of oppression!
- Pray together, saying thank you to Jesus for helping us to know how to be faithful.

Affirmation of Faith

I believe in the God of love, whose heart overflows to us, showering us with peace and hope and joy. I believe in the calling to go and care for one another. I believe God goes with us.

In his life, Jesus created space to form our faith around him, his deeds, his divinity. In his resurrection, Jesus ushered us into all faithfulness. He appeared on the road to Emmaus, he walked into locked rooms, he invited us to touch his wounds. Even those who doubted came to believe in the one whom God called Emmanuel, God with Us.

As we journey on, the Holy Spirit, the renewer of life and faith, constantly and persistently leads us on the path of righteousness.

I believe in our common table, our shared baptism, and our vows to lift one another up in the faith. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Based on Isaiah 35

God of hope and restoration, we offer these gifts to you once again, so that they may be multiplied, especially as we purchase our materials that help us to learn more about you. For the hope that a fresh book brings, a newly sharpened pencil, a legal pad that has withstood the test of time, we thank you. May our notes and our learnings increase our faith in you, O God of all mercy. And as our synapses mysteriously create new paths as we learn in community, may we be spurred to create new paths in mission and service, offering good news to the world, as a people with something to say. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Based on the hymn "Help Us Accept Each Other", James 2 and Isaiah 35

O Lord, maker of us all,

We remember how you fashioned all things in the created world, and called them and us "good."

We remember how when we were done with the desert-wandering, faced with a fulfilled promise, we became afraid, and you still called us "good."

But you taught us the truth, and reminded us that you are faithful, as we ought to be.

We remember how your Son came to earth with toes like ours that Mary kissed and called "good."

And we remember how when your Son was in the presence of Anna at the temple, he held onto her wrinkled fingers and smiled into her kind eyes, a smile that spoke the word, "good" once again.

For it is good to be in the presence of your people. It is good to be in a place, set apart from the busy-ness that this world brings.

And even though we have gotten caught up in the races that we were never meant to run, and we have failed you time and again, you remain faithful, surrounding us with love, and the goodness we radiate, calling us back to a moment of tranquility.

And as we open these sanctuary doors each week, the outside heat enters in, but in the midst of that heat, we find glimpses of you.

For you still call creation good, though we have a hard time discerning which voice is yours.
Give us the ability to tune our senses to your promise once again,
Through so many opportunities to lengthen our moments of tranquility, to learn, to be enveloped by the joy of community.

God as we attempt to be your community, we pray that we might be able to accept all people, regardless of their differences or their similarities to us. May we not see others as bad. Tune our ears to hear your voice when others speak, to hear your Word spoken by all our teachers, even people who make us uncomfortable.

Because sometimes you make us uncomfortable, God, by calling us to do things that we have forgotten how to do. Remind us that we are all trying our best, even when failure is our only option. Remind us that the living is in the trial and error. Give us the freedom to make a mistake, to receive the feedback, and to try again. We will struggle to be human. Give this community the courage to care for us and call us all "good."

Give us the ability to release our grip on judgment and to leave that to you, but to tune our hearts to mercy at the table of forgiveness, where we laugh about the good ol' days and dream of the good new days. Turn our eyes to focus on those in need, and may our words become your words when we ask instead of declare what our neighbors hope for. Help us to share what we have with those who need something.

May all people be allowed to read. May all books be allowed to be opened. May all fists open to hands of honesty, sharing the truth with those who are open to hear it. May we be the reminder to all that education does not make us less good, it makes us more free. In that vein, we ask that you free all people of tyranny and those who use their power to oppress instead of lift. May we never be tyrants— in our world, yes, but also at restaurants, in stores, on the phone with customer service people, and even in our homes. People are gifts to the world, given by you to express love and life. Remind us of that truth.

Help our community's unity to not be exclusive. Help our Christ-likeness not become uniformity. Help our education to broaden our horizons instead of shrinking them to tunnel vision. For tunnel vision is a sure sign of becoming faint, and your promise involves a slow movement toward a kingdom of mercy that has no end.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we pray all these things in the name of the one who taught us to pray saying,
Our Father...

Litany for Leaders

Invite all your faith formation leaders to come forward and stand facing the congregation. Once they've gathered, invite the congregation to join you in these words of charge and blessing.

One: Your baptism is sufficient for your calling.

All: You have been baptized in Christ, who calls us into deep and abiding faith.

One: We entrust to you the education, care, and faith formation of this community, calling upon each of you to walk with us this year.

All: We journey together, following our Lord Jesus Christ, and trusting in your faithful leadership. As we join our hearts in growing and forming our faith, we commit to supporting you as you push us and challenge us and love us.

One: Do those things with all grace, compassion, and gentleness.

All: For the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness, kindness, love, peace, forbearance, joy, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. Let us endeavor together to embody these fruits.

One: Your gifts for leadership are well-received, appreciated, and celebrated. Go with God, buoyed by the gifts of the Spirit, to love and serve our Lord. Amen.

Sermon Helps

Scripture: Mark 7:24-37

Even Jesus has things to learn. This passage in Mark, which is paralleled in Matthew 15, is one of the more difficult dialogues to read from Jesus. He is insulting and dismissive toward a Canaanite woman. Fortunately, a

parent whose child is ill is not likely to give up. Even in the face of Jesus. There are many, many things that equip us to be faith formation leaders, including being a parent. And not being a parent. And being a person simply at the table. Or being the person who is told “no, you’re wrong.”

Forming our faith happens in a multitude of ways. And it’s for everyone, even those of us who think we’re done. This vignette of Jesus, still learning, is proof that from birth until death, we will always have more growing to do.

Additional Ideas

- For Back to School and Backpack Blessing ideas see [this](#) Quicksheet.
- See also from the [Book of Common Worship](#) (WJKP, 2018) the service for Recognition of a Certified Christian Educator (BCW 492–493), the Litany of Gifts (BCW 503), and the resources for Commissioning to Ministry within a Congregation (BCW 516–521).
- If Bible presentations to elementary children are part of your celebration, [here](#) are ideas for presentation and suggested Bibles.
- For additional ways to celebrate Christian Formation week see [Faith Practices At Home](#) to start the new school year, [Blessings around the New School Year](#), [Kick Off Sunday and Intergenerational Ideas](#), and [Social Media Posts](#) for download. There are also Spanish language versions of several Quicksheets. See all the Quicksheets [here](#) and look for new ones to be added.

Writers:

Rev. Bethany Benz-Whittington - Sacred Calls

Rev. Krystal Leedy - Hope Presbyterian Church Austin TX

Miatta Wilson – Office of Christian Formation, PMA PCUSA

www.pcusa.org/formation

2024

