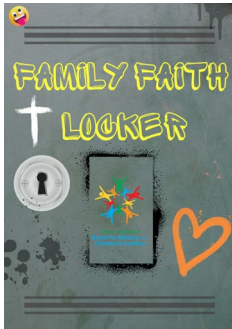


Back to School All Age Service



The aim of this service is to discover and use the talents God has given each of us for His glory, and to pray for the children, teachers and students as they return to education. We aim to build on the links already established – or even to establish new links with schools, students and teachers in our community.

Be sure to ask the local school you are linked with to advertise the service on their social media and put posters around your town / village.

There is a talk which you can use as much or as little of as you wish – please feel free to edit it to fit you. You will also find printable name cards for teachers, school pupils and students for an active prayer time. As well as a postcard you can print back-to-back and laminate for each child to take away.

Text in bold is suggested script and text in italics is a guide to what you might wish to do.

The service is designed to work in parallel with the Family Faith Locker but can also work as a standalone service. If you are distributing the family Faith Locker to your families, make sure you have packs printed and ready to give out to each family that would like one. Take time to talk them through explaining their purpose and how to use them. If possible have a model of a locker made as a demo using either a cereal box, a shoebox, folder or whatever you think your families will find easiest to find / use.



Intro:

Welcome everyone to the service, explain that this is a special service focussed on all those who are involved in education and who will be coming back to or starting for the first time at school, college, university. We will also be thinking of the teachers and staff in each school, college or university.

Let's see how many schools we have represented here today.

One at a time call out the names of the most local schools / colleges that you know people attend, and ask those connected to that place either as a student or staff member (including cleaners and secretaries etc) to stand up. Don't forget to call out home-schoolers.

Ask if there are any schools / colleges you've not mentioned.

That's amazing – isn't it wonderful how many places of education we have attached to our church family. What a wonderful opportunity we have this year to show God's love throughout our community and in these places of learning.

Worship:

Let us start our time together with some worship, raising our voices in thanks and praise to God.

For the opening worship choose 2-3 up beat songs which the children will be familiar with, either through school or through Sunday club. Some ideas:

My Lighthouse (with actions) – Rend Collective. <https://youtu.be/oZcdCqH5yDA>

Super Wonderful God (actions) – Yancy <https://youtu.be/Q7uT4NV22U0>

Every move I make – Hillsong

Reading:

If you can, ask two or three older children to read this story – colour division below to help

Matthew 25:14-30 – International Children’s Version.

A Story About Three Servants

¹⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was going to another place for a visit. Before he left, he talked with his servants. The man told them to take care of his things while he was gone. ¹⁵ He decided how much each servant would be able to care for. He gave one servant five bags of money. He gave another servant two bags of money. And he gave a third servant one bag of money. Then the man left. ¹⁶ The servant who got five bags went quickly to invest the money. The five bags of money earned five more. ¹⁷ It was the same with the servant who had two bags of money. He invested the money and earned two more. ¹⁸ But the servant who got one bag of money went out and dug a hole in the ground. Then he hid his master’s money in the hole.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master came home. He asked the servants what they did with his money. ²⁰ The servant who got five bags of money brought five more bags to the master. The servant said, ‘Master, you trusted me to care for five bags of money. So I used your five bags to earn five more.’ ²¹ The master answered, ‘You did well. You are a good servant who can be trusted. You did well with small things. So I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my happiness with me.’

²² “Then the servant who got two bags of money came to the master. The servant said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of money to care for. So I used your two bags to earn two more.’ ²³ The master answered, ‘You did well. You are a good servant who can be trusted. You did well with small things. So I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my happiness with me.’

²⁴ “Then the servant who got one bag of money came to the master. The servant said, ‘Master, I knew that you were a hard man. You harvest things you did not plant. You gather crops where you did not sow any seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid. I went and hid your money in the ground. Here is the bag of money you gave me.’ ²⁶ The master answered, ‘You are a bad and lazy servant! You say you



knew that I harvest things I did not plant, and that I gather crops where I did not sow any seed? ²⁷ So you should have put my money in the bank. Then, when I came home, I would get my money back with interest.'

²⁸ "So the master told his other servants, 'Take the bag of money from that servant and give it to the servant who has ten bags of money. ²⁹ Everyone who uses what he has will get more. He will have much more than he needs. But the one who does not use what he has will have everything taken away from him.'



Talk:

Who's excited about going to back to school?

Sometimes starting in a new class or a new school can feel very exciting, sometimes it can feel a bit like your tummy is all wobbly too – even when you get older it can still feel like that. It's totally normal to have a wobbly feeling in your tummy. I still get it when I come to speak in front of everyone here!

We are so very lucky to live in a country where we have so many opportunities to learn, to have schools that are fun, teachers that want to help us and all the books and equipment we need. Sometimes we forget just how lucky we are in this country.

But just as we heard in the Bible reading, when we have a lot given to us we also have a big responsibility to use it wisely.

When I first read this story as a child I remember thinking how unfair it was that the servant who had one bag of money and who kept it safe in the ground was the one who got told off! I always thought he had been clever in hiding it so that it didn't get taken away. Did any of you feel that way?

The thing is, this story isn't really about money, or how to get rich. The reason Jesus told this story was because he wanted us to understand the importance of us using the skills and gifts we have been given, and to make the most of the opportunities and time that we have.

When God made each one of us He knew exactly what we were capable of. He knows how confident you are, how good you are at drawing, how good you are at maths, or sports or music, he knows how kind and caring you are.

We all have been given different skills and gifts – it doesn't mean you are always going to be the best at those things – and that's ok, but you still have those amazing skills and talents. It is what you do with them that is so very important and that's what Jesus was trying to say through this story.

Jesus wanted to help us understand who God is and what He has called us to do. When the Master in the parable asked the servants to look after the money, he had thought about how much each servant could handle. He



didn't want them to become angry or upset because they had been given too much to bear. The Master gave each servant the right amount.

Just like the Master was generous and trusted the servants, so God is generous to us. He gives us plenty of gifts and lots of opportunities to use them.

Do you have a locker at school? A place where you put all your work, your books, your lunch or your bag? I used to have a locker when I was in secondary school, it was a place that was just for me – I had a key and I put all my things in there – well everything that would fit! At that time we used to decorate the inside of our lockers with pictures of the singers we liked or the teams we supported, we made it our own unique place that held all of our books and our copies, our art work and loads of other things.

At the end of the school year we had to empty our lockers out – a year's worth of paper, broken pens, posters, timetables and sometimes even lunches we'd forgotten about! What a stink that was! The thing that was always great was looking at all the things that had gone into the locker at the start of the year and then realising how much had happened since we started. We had learned so much, got better at different subjects, improved in languages, writing, art, we now understood what all the strange squiggles in the maths books meant. We had grown and really developed our skills and talents.

Lockers like this can give us a chance to time travel in some ways – to go back to how we were and realise how much we've changed. To remember how nervous we were when we first started the new school, how worried we were that we'd never work out which classroom we had to be in and when, or if we would make new friends. But at the end of the school year we realised just how much had changed. We remember the laughter, the lessons we really enjoyed, the tests we were sure we'd fail but actually we did ok in.

Lockers can be a bit like us realising that we've taken the money the master has given us and we've made so much more of it. In our case – hopefully at the end of the school year we realise that we have taken our skills, talents and gifts and grown them, used them to help others.



How sad it would be to get to the end of the school year and realise we'd done nothing with our skills, gifts or talents? We just hid them away, didn't help anyone, didn't show care and love to others, didn't encourage or help those in our school to feel happier or calmer, didn't give to those who were in need.

What will your locker say about you I wonder?

As you go back to school, college or University, I want to challenge you to think about what your skills and talents are and how you can use them to help show God's love to others. Whether we are students or staff, whether you are in Junior infants or 6th class, 1st year or starting your PHD – each one of us has skills to use.

When we are in class do we look around at others who might be feeling upset, or who haven't made a friend yet? How do we respond? When we are in the staff room do we take time to listen to our fellow teachers or are we too keen to tell our stories and release our own frustrations? If you are good at sports do you help encourage those on your team who are not as good or do you get annoyed by them because you want to win? If you are in a lecture and you see someone who is without the books they need, do you offer to share yours?

In the story the master didn't expect everyone to give him 10 more bags of money, he just expected them to do SOMETHING with what they had been given and the same is true for us. Not many of us will become doctors, or play rugby for Ireland or take part in the Olympics, but all of us can do something amazing with the gifts we do have. We can share God's love with others, telling them about Jesus, showing them care and friendship. So many things we can do.

Just like the master returned in the story, one day Jesus is returning to the earth, and we will have to tell Him what we have done with our gifts. What will you have done with the gifts that He has given you to use?



Song:

Again this is entirely up to you, but some suggestions might be:

This little light of mine

Here I am Lord

Make me a channel of your peace.

Prayer Activity:

Print out copies of the lunchboxes, coffee mugs, laptops. Place some on each pew / at the end of each line of chairs along with some pens / pencils.

We are going to take some time to pray for all those who are returning to education – either as a student or staff member. At the end of your pews you will see some pictures of lunchboxes, mugs and laptops. Take a moment and write the names of those you know – or your own name if it's you – who are going back to education.

Those who are going to school – write their first names on the lunchboxes.

Those who are teachers – write their names on the coffee mugs

Those who are going to college or University – write their names on the laptops.

Then when you are ready bring them up to the alter (or wherever you wish to put them in your church setting) and we will pray for them.

If you choose to print and laminate the back pack blessings have them at the side of the alter and encourage all those who are students or who have a student in their family to take a back pack blessing home.

(After the service you might like to gather all the names together onto a list which members of the church will receive so that they can pray for them through the year)



Closing Prayer:

Dear Lord, we give you thanks and praise for the blessing of education.

We thank you for the freedom we have to learn - help us not to take it for granted.

We pray for those in our world who are unable to access education through poverty or restrictive regimes. Restore the hope of freedom in their lives we ask Lord. Bring justice to our world, and help us each to look for ways that we can impact change and bring about your perfect justice.

We pray your protection, strength and wisdom for all who teach. Grant them patience, inspiration and renewed passion for their work.

For all who are starting new classes, new schools, colleges or Universities, we pray for peace, friendship, joy and happiness that they will soon feel settled and able to relax.

Help each of us gathered here today to consider the talents you have given us and may we seek your wisdom to how best to use those gifts for your glory.

We ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus, our Lord and saviour.

Amen

Proverbs 3:13:

*¹³ "Blessed are those who find wisdom,
those who gain understanding,
¹⁴ for she is more profitable than silver
and yields better returns than gold."*