

This liturgy was written by the Rev. David Henson, currently at Trinity Episcopal Church, Asheville, NC, and posted to his blog. He writes, "I created a liturgy that doesn't gloss over the anxiety, frustration, hope and fears that come with new beginnings and with returning to school."

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A Service for A New School Year

Arrange chairs in a circle with an offering plate in the center. Pass out two different colors of index cards and pens. Ask participants to spend several minutes reflecting on the coming school year. On one color, have them write their fears or frustrations; on the other, their dreams and hopes for the year. Once finished, open the space for sharing, but do not press the issue. Pass the offering plate to collect the cards. (Optional) Pass the plate a second time and ask the participants to select on card of each color. If they draw their own, have them draw again.

During the calls and responses in the service, have a different leader for each couplet, rotating around the circle.

Litany of Beginnings

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,* not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Leader: It is the beginning of a new school year, and God is a God of new beginnings and new creations. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, new life, blessed it and called it good.

People: We give thanks for a new year and for new beginnings.
We give thanks that you call us good.

Leader: In the beginning, the heavens shone forth a star when our Savior was born. In the beginning of his ministry, the heavens opened up and called him God's beloved.

People: We give thanks that you know our pathways and what it means to be human. We give thanks that you call us your beloved children.

O God of new beginnings, new life, and new journeys, you sent Abraham and Sarah into a new land; you led Moses, Aaron and Miriam out of Egypt and into liberation; you led your Son our Savior to earth, to the cross, and into resurrection. Walk with us, we pray, as we enter into a new year, a new path, new opportunities. *Amen.*

Litany of Difficulties

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A gale arose on the lake, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed.

Matthew 8:23-28

Leader: We will get overwhelmed by tests, homework, and activities, and we will wonder how we will make it through.

People: Grant us quiet confidence and calm, bear our stress with us, help us to ask for help when it gets to be too much.

Leader: Our teachers, parents, and friends will piss us off and frustrate us. They will be unfair, they will hurt us, and they just won't get what we're going through.

People: Give us peace and rest in the midst of the storms raging around us and inside us.

Leader: We will be measured, tested, and judged, and we will be asked to measure our worth in how well we perform, the grades we make, and the friends we have.

People: Comfort us in the knowledge that you have already judged us and found us to be good, made us worthy, and called us by name.

Leader: We will be tempted to despair and see ourselves as worthless and unlovable.

People: When we cannot find our way, remind us that, to you, O God, the darkness is not dark, the night is as light as day, and even if we make our beds in hell, still there you will be beside us.

Leader: We will see darkness. We will see it in injustice, hate, exploitation, mean-spiritedness, and bullying of our peers. We will be tempted to join in.

People: Give us courage to resist and empower us to be your beloved people: loving others and standing up for the oppressed.

Leader: We will want popularity: we will want to fit in, even at the expense of others and we will wish to be people other than ourselves, the people you created us to be.

People: Remind us our identity, given in baptism, to be your sons and daughters.

Leader: We will want to hold grudges, gripe, and gossip when we are wounded.

People: Empower us by your grace to forgive as you have forgiven.

A Gathering of Hopes and Fears

Almighty God, to whom our needs are known before we ask: Help us to ask only what accords with your will; and those good things which we dare not, or in our blindness cannot ask, grant us for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(Source: Book of Common Prayer)

Cards with fears and frustrations are lifted up in offering plate or read aloud, if this is the wish of the gathered community. Then, the leader says:

Leader: These are our prayers, our fears and our frustrations for the year.

People: We will bear them with each other.

Cards with dreams and hopes are lifted up in offering plate or read aloud, if this is the wish of the gathered community. Then, the leader says:

Leader: These are our prayers, our hopes and dreams for the year.

People: We will dream them with each other.

Leader: In the name of God, we send each other forth with these dreams and fears of our community.

People: We pledge to pray with them each day.

A General Thanksgiving

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love.

(Pause for thanksgivings from the group)

We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

(Pause for thanksgivings for friends and family from the group)

We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us.

(Pause for thanksgivings for our tasks)

We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

(Pause for thanksgivings for our failures)

Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he overcame death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know him and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. *Amen.*

(Source: Book of Common Prayer)

Closing Blessing

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace to follow the good road and may God's blessing be with you always. *Amen.*

(source: from Saint Clare, Enriching Our Worship 1)