



Diocese of
Hereford
Proclaiming Christ ✦ Growing Disciples



An order of service For
Back to School Sunday

www.hereford.anglican.org

ORDER OF SERVICE

HYMN

THE GATHERING

We say together the words in bold

Welcome in the name of Christ.

God's grace, mercy and peace be with you

and also with you.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, direct our thoughts, and teach us to pray.

Lift up our hearts to worship you in spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

We come to God as one from whom no secrets are hidden,
to ask for his forgiveness and peace.

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:
fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:
fill us with your Spirit.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:
fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May the Father forgive us
by the death of his Son
and strengthen us
to live in the power of the Spirit
all our days.

Amen.

THE READINGS

These are the 'related' lectionary readings for September 6th. You could use these, or other things you choose specifically for the occasion. Every service should include a reading from one of the four gospels.

Consider using a children's Bible, or an international readers' translation to make it easier for young listeners to understand.

- Ezekiel 33:7–11 – God calls us to responsibility and care for one another.
- Matthew 18:15–20 – Building healthy relationships, reconciliation, and Christ's presence in the community.

These are the other lectionary readings if more appropriate

- Psalm 119:33–40 – "Teach me, O Lord..." A beautiful prayer for pupils, teachers, and lifelong learners.
- Romans 13:8–14 – Love your neighbour; live honourably.

Some other options are:

- Joshua 1:1–9 – Be strong and courageous.
- Psalm 121 – The Lord will watch over you.
- Luke 2:41–52 – Jesus grows in wisdom.
- or Matthew 5:13–16 – Let your light shine.

Before the first reading, the reader says

The first reading is from the book of x beginning to read at verse x

At the end of the reading, the reader will say

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN OR SONG

Before the Gospel reading, the reader says

Cast your cares upon God.

Know that the Lord cares for you.

cf 1 Peter 5.7

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to N.

Glory to you, O Lord.

At the end of the reading, the reader says

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

THE SERMON

THE PRAYERS

The response to the bidding 'Lord in your mercy' is 'hear our prayer'

Gracious God, as a new school year begins, we thank you for a new start. We pray for everyone returning to school, college and university. Be with those who are excited, those who are nervous, and those facing new challenges. Give them courage, wisdom and joy in learning.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

We pray for teachers, support staff, governors, chaplains, families and carers. Bless all who help others to learn and grow. Help our schools and communities to be places of kindness, where people listen well, forgive one another, and care for those who are left out. May we remember Jesus' promise to be with us whenever we gather in his name.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

We pray for our homes and our communities. Bless parents, grandparents, carers and families. Help us, whatever our age, to learn from one another, to speak kindly, to forgive readily, and to build communities where everyone is welcomed, valued and respected.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are sick in body, mind or spirit; for those who are lonely, anxious or grieving; and for those who care for them. Bring healing, comfort and hope.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

In a moment of quiet, we bring to God the people and situations that are on our hearts today.

Silence is kept

Loving God, receive these prayers, and all that we cannot find the words to say.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Faithful God, be with us in the year ahead. Help us to grow in wisdom, kindness and love, so that in all we do we may follow Christ.

**Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

HYMN OR SONG

Suggestion of something lively to invigorate and encourage. Possibly an action song

THE BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS

The congregation, especially the children, bring backpacks, laptop bags, and other bags that carry the things of work, school, college or university to the front of the church. They might leave them there, or stand with them, or the bags may have been arranged before worship begins. After everything is in place, the leader says

Today we bring our backpacks, book bags and school bags to God. They remind us of all that we will carry this year: books and pencils, homework and lunches, hopes and dreams, questions and challenges.

So let's ask God's blessing on everyone who carries a bag to school.

When your backpack feels heavy,
God walks beside us.

When there is something new to learn,
God gives us wisdom.

When we make new friends,
God fills our hearts with kindness.

When we make mistakes
God gives us courage to begin again.

When we help others
God's love shines through us.

Wherever we go
God goes with us!

Let us pray.

Loving God, bless these backpacks, and everyone who carries them. Fill this school year with curiosity, kindness, courage and joy. Help us to learn well, to care for one another, and to remember that wherever we go, you are with us.

Amen.

If they bags have been placed at the altar earlier in the service, or for the blessing, the children and adults are invited to come and retrieve their bag, and each person may be handed a luggage tag with a prayer, drawing, illustration, photo or the church logo on it to remind them that God goes with them

THE SENDING OUT

As a new school year begins, God calls each of us to learn with open minds, to love with generous hearts, and to follow Christ wherever he leads.

So let us commit ourselves to the year ahead.

Will you be curious in your learning, honest in your work,
and faithful in your friendships?

With God's help, we will.

Will you show kindness to those who are lonely,
courage when life is difficult,
and forgiveness when relationships are strained?

With God's help, we will.

Will you use your gifts to serve others,
care for God's world,
and help others to know the love of God?

With God's help, we will.

**Loving God, as we go from this place, fill us with your Spirit.
Help us to listen for your voice, follow your example,
and bring us safely to the work you have prepared for us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Amen

THE BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

Go forth into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast to that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;
help the afflicted; honour everyone;
love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy
Spirit be with you, and remain with you always.

Amen

RECESSIONAL HYMN OR SONG

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

FURTHER RESOURCES:

<https://www.manchester.anglican.org/support/for-schools/training-resources/back-to-school-sunday/>

<https://www.illustratedministry.com/2021/blessing-of-the-backpacks-back-to-school-worship-liturgy/>

POSSIBLE ALL AGE SERMON

Using the lectionary readings - Staying close to Jesus

Ezekiel 33:7–11 & Matthew 18:15–20

(Bible quotations from the New International Reader's Version (NIRV))

Length

Approximately six minutes.

Object needed: A high-visibility jacket.

One main point: Following Jesus helps us become the people God made us to be.

1. Begin with the high-visibility jacket

Put on or hold up the jacket.

Ask:

- Who might wear a jacket like this?
- Why is it so bright?
- What might the person wearing it need to say?

Use a simple road-crossing example.

Imagine that someone is about to cross the road without noticing a car. A person calls out, "Stop!"

Emphasise:

- They are not trying to spoil the person's day.
- They are not warning them because they think they are better.
- They speak because they care about where the person is going.

In Ezekiel, God gives someone a job a little like this.

2. Introduce Ezekiel as the watchman

Explain that a watchman looked out for danger and warned people when they were heading the wrong way.

Explain:

- God's people were going in the wrong direction.
- They were not becoming the people God had made them to be.
- God had called them to love him and show his goodness in the world.
- Instead, they were choosing ways that hurt themselves and others.

God's warning was not simply about keeping rules. God wanted them to turn back towards the kind of life he had made them for.

Explain what it is to "live"

A child may say, "But they were already alive."

Agree that they were breathing, walking and eating.

Then explain that "living" here means more than staying physically alive. It means:

- living close to God;
- learning God's good way;
- becoming loving, truthful, fair, generous and kind;
- growing into the people God created human beings to be.

For Christians, Jesus shows us most clearly what this life looks like.

3. Explain why following Jesus matters

Following Jesus helps us become the people God made us to be.

Explain that Jesus shows us what a truly human life, open to God, looks like.

Choose several examples:

- Jesus notices people whom others ignore.
- Jesus welcomes people who are left out.
- Jesus tells the truth.
- Jesus forgives.
- Jesus serves instead of trying to be the most important.
- Jesus is brave when doing the right thing is difficult.
- Jesus loves God and loves other people.

Explain that when Jesus says, "Follow me," he means more than walking behind him.

Following Jesus means:

- watching how Jesus lives;
- listening to what Jesus teaches;
- trusting his way;
- practising his way in our own lives.

Repeat the main point: **Following Jesus helps us become the people God made us to be.**

4. Connect to Matthew 18 through friendship

Explain that following Jesus is not something we do alone.

Jesus gives us friends and a church community who can help us stay close to him. We need each other to become who we were meant to be.

Explain simply:

Jesus does not tell us to:

- spread the story;
- embarrass the person;
- make ourselves look better;
- try to win an argument.

Jesus tells us to go to the person directly and speak:

- privately;
- honestly;
- gently;
- lovingly.

The aim is not to win the argument. the aim is to put right what has gone wrong and restore the relationship. A friend might help us follow Jesus by saying:

- "That was not very kind."
- "I think you need to tell the truth."
- "Please don't join in with that."
- "Should we try to put this right?"
- "I don't think that choice is helping you follow Jesus."

A good friend does not try to make us into the person they think we should be. A good friend helps us stay close to Jesus and become the person God made us to be. Make clear that this works both ways. Sometimes we help a friend. Sometimes we need to listen when a friend helps us. Children, adults, parents, teachers and church leaders all need help following Jesus.

5. Back-to-school application

A new school year brings many things to learn: Reading, music, sport, friendship etc. But along with our maths homework, our music practice and our work, we have to practice following Jesus too to get better at it, and we practice by asking God what he'd like us to do, and then by doing it.

Invite everyone to ask one question to God each morning as they put on their shoes "Jesus, how can I follow you today?", and wait to see if God answers. He might say to

- Welcome someone who is alone.
- Tell the truth when lying would be easier.
- Apologise when you have hurt somebody.
- Refuse to join in with unkindness.
- Encourage someone who feels worried.
- Listen when somebody lovingly tells you that you are going the wrong way.
- Help a friend put something right.

6. Conclusion

Hold up the high-visibility jacket again.

Remind the congregation:

The jacket helps us notice someone who may need to say:

- "Stop."
- "Not that way."
- "Come this way."

God gave Ezekiel the task of warning people because God cared about where they were going.

Jesus invites us to follow him because his way leads us towards the life God made us for.

Jesus also gives us one another so that we can gently and honestly help each other stay on that way. It's a new school year, and another new opportunity to try and listen to God, and do his work, and grow into being more like him.

Because following Jesus helps us become the people God made us to be.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for showing us God's good way to live.

Help us stay close to you, listen to your words and practise your way.

Help us become loving, truthful, brave and kind.

Give us friends who help us follow you, and teach us to help our friends gently and honestly.

When we are going the wrong way, help us listen and turn around.

Lead us into the life God made us for. Amen.