



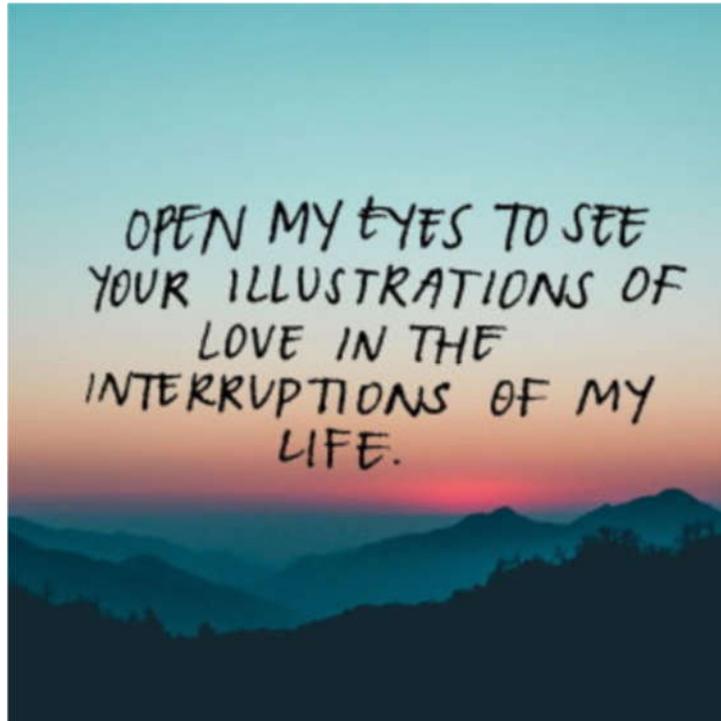
Setting up the space:

*Social distancing requirements should be observed in terms of the room set up. A small sacred space at the top of the room is required. This space needs to look like a journey/a pathway. This can be done in any number of ways. Your RE teacher can help you with this. On your pathway, you might include a bible, a large candle in the centre (you could have a number of smaller candles on the pathway itself), a water feature (even a simple bowl of water), some flowers etc. You'll also need five A3 size (or bigger – depending on the size of the room) sheets with the following **five statements** clearly printed on them:*

- 1. Being with others is the key to happiness**
- 2. Reducing stress is good for everyone**
- 3. Showing gratitude matters**
- 4. We need less stuff than we think**
- 5. We are stronger when we act together**

You might also have a screen to allow for readings, lyrics of songs etc. to be displayed. Ideally, begin with a song/piece of music from your assembled music group. Something fairly lively and uplifting! Or a small section of an online piece of music relevant to the theme might work well.

This prayer service requires the assistance of a number of readers from the fifth year group itself as well as help from the Year Head and your RE team.



Suggested Text for Prayer Service

Principal: Hello everyone. Thanks to _____ for that beautiful piece of music. We begin our assembly as we begin every assembly in _____ (name of school), by blessing ourselves, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Welcome back everyone. It's great to see you all looking so refreshed and ready for the new term. These have been very strange times, haven't they? We've really missed you all. And well done on doing your best over the last few months – especially during lock down. You were part of the solution that saw us being able to be back together as a school. It's worth remembering that; that what you did especially during the hardest days of lockdown made a big difference. And we're really, really proud of you.

So, fifth year awaits you. But – and this is stating the obvious – there isn't any person in this room who knows what the future holds. This has always been the case of course! But I think it's true to say that we're all feeling it much more now. Many of us are feeling like we don't know what's ahead at all. So, for this assembly we're going to take some time to come to grips with that reality, with that uncertainty. Because how we all deal with this uncertainty will have a big impact on how we manage fifth year.

The theme for our assembly is ***Going Forward Together***. So we're not going to shy away from the challenge or pretend that everything is completely back to normal. That would be foolish of us and wouldn't be respectful of your own sense of things. This theme is symbolised in our sacred space here which looks like a pathway. You're on this journey and we hope you'll get a sense today of the kinds of things that you'll need to help you on the journey.

Before we begin properly, I'd like to welcome especially _____ (other teachers' names). They'll be helping me lead this assembly. Thank you.

In our school, for every assembly, we also recognise that God is among us and with us. To do that, to make God's presence feel a bit more real to us; we're going to light a candle. God reaches out to us

and we reach out to God, in faith. In the midst of so much uncertainty, we know God is constant and sure.

This candle is the candle we'll light every time we pray together. It's the same candle that is lit for all the year groups. I invite now _____ (name of fifth year student) to light our candle on your behalf. This candle is the first important symbol of our assembly; it represents hope. It represents 'God with us'. It represents our community here in _____ (school's name) and the sense that united around this flame, we are all in this together, to support and help one another.



Year Head: Thanks to _____ (student's name, for lighting our candle). Welcome back everyone. I'm delighted to be your Year Head for this year. And I'd like to echo the words of congratulations and good wishes of _____ (Principal's name) for the year ahead.

To get a sense of what will help us deal with the uncertainty ahead, it's worth reflecting on what we have learned during these last few months. _____ (students' name) are going to lead us on this for us now.

But before they do we're going to listen to the Word of God. This is a reading from the Old Testament from the Prophet Isaiah and it captures well our faith here in _____ (school's name) and that God is with you on your journey.

Student: A reading from the Prophet Isaiah

This is what the LORD says: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity.

The word of the Lord (Thanks be to God)

Principal: So what are the things we can take from this reading and from our time over the last few months. We'll ask _____ (students' names) to lead us on this now

(Note 1: this text has been adapted from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_lessons_to_remember_when_lockdown_ends by Jill Suttie. You can adapt it further – or your students can adapt it depending on their own specific experiences).

(Note 2: In terms of managing this piece, ask five students to read each of five lessons, ask another five students to carry up the corresponding poster and ask another five to read the corresponding prayers – they’re in the text boxes under each of the five ‘lessons’).

Student:

Any number of articles in newspapers and online over the last number of months have been written to try to unpack what these really strange and challenging times have taught us about ourselves and how we might cope with uncertainty and change. We’re going to look at the five lessons we thought were maybe the most relevant to us now at the moment as we start fifth year.

Student: The first lesson is – “**Being with others is the key to happiness**”. (*Poster with this ‘lesson’ is brought up to sacred space*)

While we’ll all continue to use online tools to stay connected with faraway friends or for study, we’ve all gained a newfound appreciation for in-person get-togethers. The sense of connection we get from being in the physical presence of others sharing an experience together is inspiring and sacred. This sense of connection to friends, and to family deepens my sense of common humanity—something that when scaled up can build a kinder, more connected society. We know, of course, we must respect social distancing guidelines but there is something really special about everyone being back together again. Deep down, we know we need one another.

Student:

Lord, help us to see the value of everyone in our year group. Help us to reach out to people who are not necessarily our closest friends. Build within our group a real bond of caring and affection as we travel this journey through fifth year together.

Student: Lesson 2 is “**Reducing stress is good for everyone**”. (*Poster with this ‘lesson’ is brought up to sacred space*)

Being in a constant state of high alert is not good for our minds or bodies—or for those around us, either.

However, one silver lining of staying at home is that it’s forced many of us to slow down some and find new ways to manage stress and anxiety. Some have turned to drawing, planting a garden, or playing a musical instrument. Walking, cycling, running, being outdoors have helped others. Volunteering, helping others has been scientifically proven to be one of the greatest stress busters of all. All of these have the potential to improve your mental health and need to be held on to as we go forward together. If you haven’t developed some additional ways of unwinding, maybe that’s something you could look at now for yourself, now we’re back together in school.

Student:

Lord, help us to find ways of coping with any stresses we may experience over the next few months. Help us to be creative and resilient. Help us to help one another as well. Help us to reach out to others if we feel low and in need of extra help.

Student: Our third lesson has undoubtedly been, **“Showing gratitude matters”**. (*Poster with this ‘lesson’ is brought up to sacred space*)

We’ve gotten used to, during lockdown, expressions of gratitude to health workers and essential workers. In the UK, every week they clapped for them. This happened in Spain and France as well. In Ireland, people hung out flags and hung up rainbows and messages of thanks.

Showing gratitude to all those who help us not only feels good, it encourages more kindness and generosity in both gratitude recipients and anyone who witnesses the expression of gratitude, therefore building a kinder, more compassionate society—something we should all keep in mind.

There are lots of ways we can gently introduce gratitude into our time together as fifth years. There is a quality to this kind of gratitude that simply says to the other person, ‘I’m glad you’re here’. ‘I’m glad we’re all together in this’.

Student:

Lord, help us to be grateful for all the good things in our lives and for the people who are journeying with us this year. Help us to have a good sense of humour about the challenges we face. Help us to have fun and to really enjoy the year ahead together.

Student: Our fourth lesson is **“We need less stuff than we think”**. (*Poster with this ‘lesson’ is brought up to sacred space*)

It’s pretty clear that we don’t need so much stuff as we’ve become accustomed to. The basic essentials—food, clean water, and good health, for example—are much more important than having a manicure or buying the newest computer. Given how many of these consumer items and activities negatively impact the health of the planet, it makes sense to rethink our priorities and consider skipping some to allow everyone to have the basics for survival.

Luckily, our wellbeing isn’t dependent on consumer products. Studies have found that kindness and generosity make us happier than pampering ourselves or buying ourselves stuff. It may be hard to believe; in fact, researchers often find that people underestimate the impact of giving to others on their happiness.

Student:

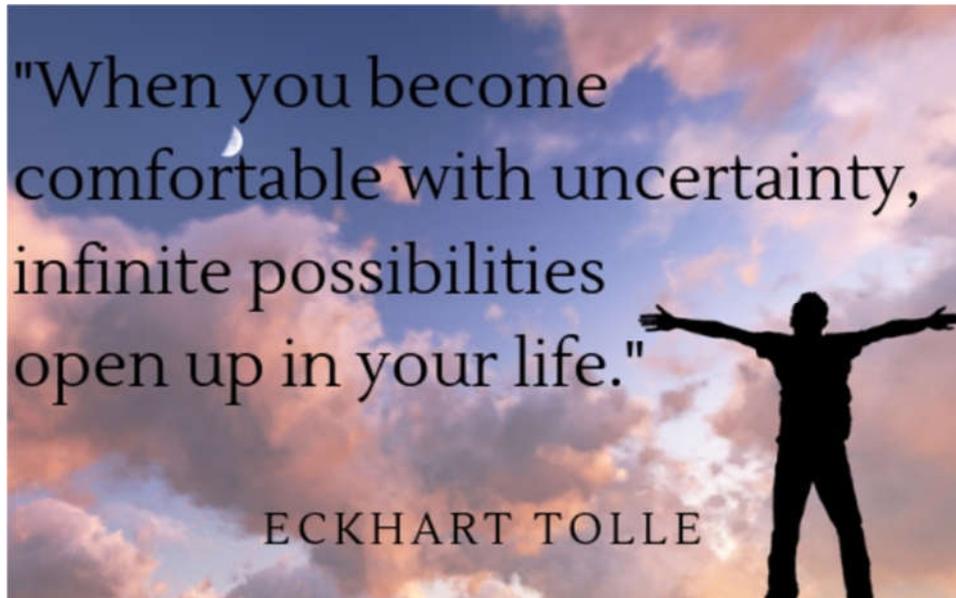
Lord, help us to get our priorities straight. During these challenging times, we’ve realised that things don’t make people happy, people make people happy. Help us to stay deeply connected to that truth for the year ahead.

Student: Our final lesson is **“We are stronger when we act together”**. (*Poster with this ‘lesson’ is brought up to sacred space*).

Seeing how willing people were to cooperate with really difficult restrictions for the good of all gives me hope. It’s not easy to get that many people to move in the one direction, especially when they have to sacrifice some of their personal freedoms to do it. But working together for the common good is helping us fight the pandemic and could bode well for solving other worldwide problems requiring cooperation—like poverty, racism and climate change.

Student:

Lord, of all the lessons we need to learn this is the most important one. Help us to stay strong as a community. Help us to realise that together we can achieve our dreams. With one another's help and support, and with your help God, all things are possible.



Principal: We conclude now by asking you to bless one another for the year ahead. We'd ask you to turn to the person to your right/left, lift one hand towards them repeat the following words of blessing after me.

May the Lord bless you and keep you,

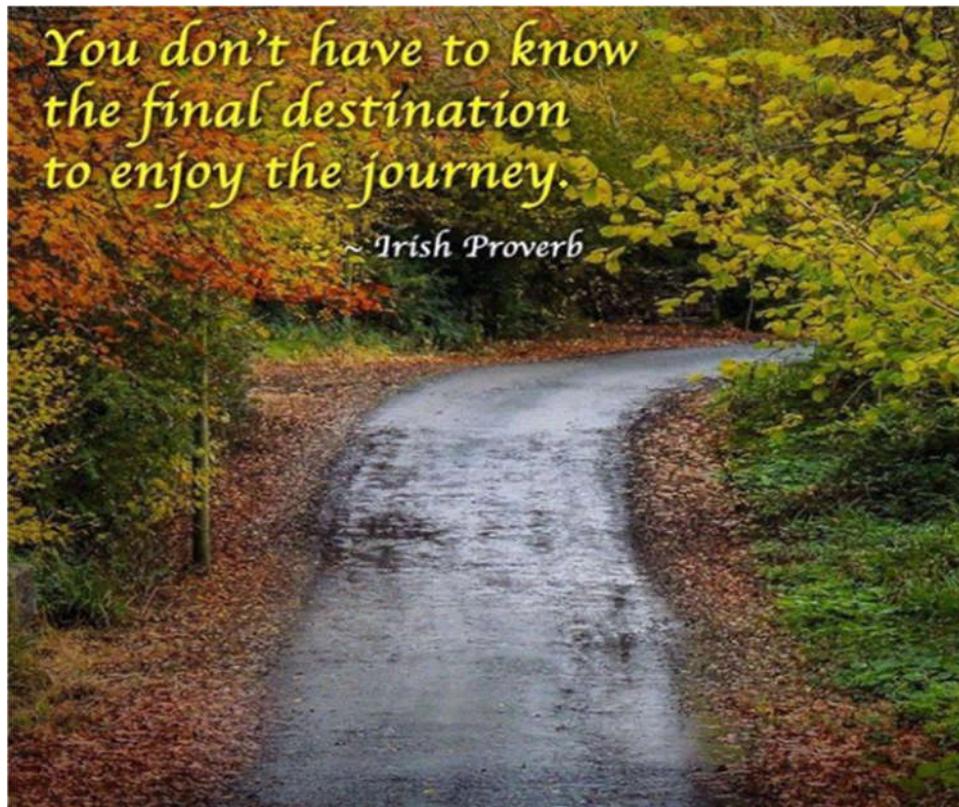
May the Lord make his face shine upon you,

May the Lord forever hold you in the palm of his hand.

May you know always care, affection and togetherness

And when this year is done, may you know the deep satisfaction of a journey walked in faith and in trust.

AMEN.



Principal: We conclude now with a short hymn (you can have your own music group play something or perhaps use this beautiful hymn: God with me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNN3htT151I>) Thanks to you all for helping me to lead this assembly and especially to _____ (teachers' names) for their help. God bless you all.