



## 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. A small 'tree'/branch – a gratitude tree should form the centre of the sacred space. Around it, you might place, a candle, a bible, flowers etc. You'll also need a punnet of strawberries! And five/six small jam jars lined in a row across your sacred space.*

*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 Sixth 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. Let me start by saying 'well done'. 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 and so happy to have you back with us.

So, your final year with us here in \_\_\_\_\_ (school's name) awaits you. I think it would be fair to say that the year ahead is going to be challenging for lots of reasons. And perhaps the most significant of those reasons has to do with how you're going to manage it all in your own head. Everyone is finding the uncertainty, all the media coverage, the questions, the doubts and sometimes, the downright hysteria really hard. You're not alone in that. Many of us are feeling like we don't know what's ahead at all. So, how, I hear you ask are we all going to cope? What strategies might we develop to help you not only survive all of this but actually really enjoy your last year in our school?

I don't want to overstate that but that is really a huge priority for us all here in \_\_\_\_\_ (school name). It's really important to us that you actually enjoy and thrive during this year. You've given us so much so far in your years with us. You've achieved so much. We're really, really proud of you. We want the very best for you. And we know that you'll only really be able to look out for other people – younger students in the school, for example – if you feel looked after yourselves and are happy.

The theme for our assembly gives a hint at what we believe will help – and it's a very simple idea rooted in really good science. We believe that if we all take a step back every now and then and 'be grateful' for what we have and who we are then we'll get through the next year and in fact really enjoy it.

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. In lighting this candle, we recognise God not only as the source of our lives, but as the source of our happiness. As Christians we believe, it is only in God that our hearts can be fully happy.

So let's light this candle now as a symbol of God's love for us and faith in us. 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 sixth 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.



**6<sup>th</sup> Year 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 \_\_\_\_\_ (Principal's name) for the year ahead. Your contentment here in \_\_\_\_\_ (school's name) and your wellbeing matter to us and have always mattered to us. Yes, we want you to do your best academically but all the points in the world are meaningless unless you're happy!

**Principal:** So we're going to begin with a rather unusual story; one from Buddhism and it's going to be read for us now by \_\_\_\_\_ (student's name). This story is symbolised in the strawberries on our sacred space. These strawberries represent gratitude.

(Note: These strawberries can be lifted up by a student for everyone to see if the group is very big!)

**Student:** An honours student, frustrated with his life and with school, worried about what tomorrow may bring, approached his teacher asking for some guidance.

"The story goes," says the teacher in response to his students request for help, "That a Buddhist Monk was walking through the mountains one day. Then, out of nowhere, a tiger appears, chasing the monk towards the edge of a cliff. The monk, in his quest to escape the tiger, runs to the edge of the cliff and climbs over the side, where he sees five other tigers 15 feet below him, waiting to eat him.

So the monk is just hanging there, holding on to a vine on the side of the cliff, waiting there for the little chance he has to escape or for his imminent demise. Then, as the monk hangs there, exploring his options, he turns to the left and sees a strawberry.

He smiles, "Wow what a magnificent strawberry!" he says to himself. So, he picks it and he eats it.



The student waited for his teacher to continue but it was clear that the teacher was done with the story. "That's it? That's the story? The monk is about to be eaten by tigers so he reaches out to pick and eat a strawberry?" the student exclaimed.

"What's the point?" he added.

The teacher replied, "The lesson is to know and embrace the experience of being alive. You must be alive every second you are alive."

The student responded, "But teacher, everyone is alive when they are alive."

"No," said the teacher. "It's the experience of being alive in each moment, in each experience, good and bad. We must be alive every second we are alive and not simply exist and live out our days."

The student, confused, questioned his teacher, asking, "But everyone alive is alive, aren't they?" he insisted.

"No. Look at you now," explained the teacher. "You are running around being chased by tigers, consumed with your thoughts of how it could be better, how you could be better if only things were different. Yet, you have shared with me over the past year several difficult situations, in addition to the circumstances that I have observed, how you were about to be eaten by tigers and how you have been saved in each situation. You can't be alive if you are living in fear and if you're living in fear you can't see and experience life; the magnificence of your life that is right in front of you in each moment."

The teacher asked, "Are you running around, grinning over the feeling of being the luckiest, most fortunate and appreciative person in the world because of what IS present in your life today, or are you consumed with fear, of what you DON'T have in your life or what may possibly happen sometime in the future?"

The student thought for a moment, looked up at his teacher, smiled, and continued on with his day...



**Principal:** This idea of gratitude is also present in other religious traditions. It's in Christianity as well, and for us as Christians, Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of a life lived in peace and gratitude. We're going to listen now to the Word of God which teaches us always to be grateful because it is that gratitude that will bring us peace. Our bible is a symbol in our sacred space and is also a symbol of that gratitude. We're now going to hear a selection of texts that teach us about gratitude.

\_\_\_\_\_ (students' names)

**Student:** The Thessalonians (from the city of Thessalonica) were very new converts to Christianity. They were very young in their faith and unsure of themselves in lots of ways. In his first letter to them, he wrote, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

**Student:** St Paul had this to say to them in his second letter to them, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

**Student:** In difficult circumstances, the new Christians of Thessalonica held firm to their faith and the community grew and thrived. St Paul linked two things together in terms of this; firstly, prayer. He believed that prayer helped these young Christians stay rooted to God and stay rooted to their community. The second thing was this attitude of gratitude; an awareness, even in times of struggle, of all the good gifts that God had given them. In the Christian tradition, deep gratitude is not something we manufacture up ourselves, ultimately it is a gift from God arising out of our own faith that he will look after us and is looking after us

The word of the Lord (Thanks be to God).

**Principal:** So what does this look like for us in practical terms – this gratitude that will bring us deep peace and contentment? \_\_\_\_\_ (Student name) are going to share now a short poem that demonstrates just how simple gratitude is. We’re then going to ask you to do a little gratitude exercise.

**Student:** Gratitude by Beau Taplin

I’m beginning to recognise that real happiness,  
Isn’t something large and looming on the  
Horizon but something small,  
Numerous and already here. A decent  
Breakfast. The warm sunset. The smile of  
Someone you love. Your little everyday joys all  
Lined up in a row.

**Principal:** Thanks \_\_\_\_\_ (student name) for that. So under your seat, you’ll see a little envelope, and the enveloped is entitled, ‘Gratitude moments’. And in that envelope are about 150 little pieces of paper – one for every day of this term!

Take one of the pieces of paper in the envelope now and take the envelope away with you with all the other pieces of paper. You’ll see on our sacred space a number of little jam jars. We’re going to call these jam jars our Strawberry Jars! (Remember our story and the ability of the monk to appreciate the strawberry!)

I’m going to ask you now (as you listen to some music) to recall one thing you’re grateful for at the moment. You might be tempted to think about all the things that are annoying you or upsetting you! But try to stay positive – what is the one thing that brings you real joy. What are you deeply happy about today? It could be a person, or an experience? If you can’t think of anything from today, then think about yesterday or even a few weeks ago. It could be something very big or something very small. And when you’ve written it down, in your own time, just place it in one of the jars. (Maintaining social distance as you do so).



(Note: This moment will obviously have to be carefully managed. It is important however to involve all students in this. Quiet music and/or a PowerPoint of images of students/friends etc might work well here to heighten student awareness of the things for which they feel grateful. To save time, a lovely song that might work here is Louis Armstrong, 'What a wonderful world'. This version is student friendly: <https://youtu.be/2nGKqH26xlg> This version is also good <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5TwT69i1IU>)



**Principal:** So in front of us all now we've all of these things or experiences or people we're grateful for. We'll keep these gratitude jars and return to them at Christmas time. At that time, we'll also ask you to return your other slips of paper with words of gratitude you've written on the slips of paper provided in your envelope. It's a good practice to try to do every day; maybe every evening. Just write down one thing for which you feel grateful today.

**Year Head:** We are aware of course too that there are lots of things that are challenging at this time. And it's important for you to know that we're here to listen to your concerns. As your Year Head, it's important for me to let you know about.... (outline here your school's pastoral care/student support arrangements/team). You're not on your own. Yes, be grateful but also be aware of the help that's out there for you when you're struggling.

**Principal:** Thanks \_\_\_\_\_ (Year Head's name) for that very important reminder about the supports that are here for you. In \_\_\_\_\_ (school's name) we know as well that God is with us, supporting us in our lives. And so we turn now to God in prayer. \_\_\_\_\_ (students' names) will lead us in our prayer

**Student:** In gratitude, we pray for one another. This may not be the kind of sixth year we thought we'd have but we pray that we'll all enjoy it and enjoy one another's friendship and company. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us)

**Student:** For students who are worried about anything; big or small. We pray that we'll have the eyes to see that they need us and the wisdom to know how we can best help them. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us)

**Student:** In gratitude, we pray for our families; that they'll continue to support us through this very important year in our lives. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us).

**Student:** For those in leadership in our country, that they'll make the best possible decisions for the good of all of the people. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us).

**Student:** For those who are suffering because they don't have the basics they need to survive. In particular we pray for the people of Lebanon and those suffering in countries in our world where there is war. We pray we'll have the courage to reach out to help in whatever way we can. We pray that through our support those in need will understand that they are not alone. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us).

**Student:** In gratitude, we pray for our own achievements and our own talents and abilities. Thank you, God for all that you have given us. May we always use our gifts and talents in the service of others. Lord hear us (Lord graciously hear us).

**Principal:** Thanks \_\_\_\_\_ (students' names). We conclude now with a fun little song, full of hope and joy. It's from the movie 'Home' and it's called, *Feel the Light, Jennifer Lopez*

As we listen to it, I'd invite you to spend some time looking again at the candle we lit at the start of our assembly. It is this light that we hope will guide you during the year ahead. We pray you peace and joy on your journey during the year. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qjo6H4iRy7U> God bless.

