

Staff Meeting - Opening Prayer

(Meeting 1: Academic Year 2020/2021)



Reader 1: We begin our Prayer, together, “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.” And we light this candle as a sign and symbol of God’s loving presence with us as we begin our first meeting of this academic year.



Principal: It would be fair to say that there has been no opening staff meeting quite like this in the history of our school. All across the country, schools – primary and secondary – are facing the same challenges and changed reality we’re facing. A huge amount of preparation has gone in to the opening of the school this year and I want to thank you all for your engagement with me and _____ (senior management team) on this.

It’s important to many of us that we begin with a prayer. For all of us it is important just to take a pause before the year starts proper to gather our thoughts and to connect in with our own personal and deepest motivations for the work we’re going to do this year.

There are any number of themes or ideas that might frame a prayer such as this; the importance of perseverance, the value of service, the principle of solidarity, the strength that comes from community. But I’m going to propose that we just take a few moments to reflect on a simple concept and that is the idea of continuity. Today I’d invite to reflect not on what’s different about the year ahead but what is the same. To do that we’ll start with a beautiful poem called ‘Begin Again’ by Brendan Kennelly.

Reader 1:

***Begin again to the summoning birds
to the sight of light at the window,
begin to the roar of morning traffic
all along Pembroke Road.***

***Every beginning is a promise
born in light and dying in dark determination
and exaltation of springtime
flowering the way to work.***

***Begin to the pageant of queuing girls
the arrogant loneliness of swans in the canal
bridges linking the past and the future
old friends passing through with us still.***

***Begin to the loneliness that cannot end
since it perhaps is what makes us begin,
begin to wonder at unknown faces
at crying birds in the sudden rain
at branches stark in the willing sunlight
at seagulls foraging for bread
at couples sharing a sunny secret
alone together while making good.***

***Though we live in a world that dreams of ending, that always seems about to give into something,
that will not acknowledge conclusion, insists that we forever begin.***

(Note: alternatively, you could play a lovely video of this <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgutn01utWQ> with perhaps some instrumental music quietly playing in the background)

Reader 2: The first thing that is obviously the same, that we must 'begin again' with'; that offers continuity, is our students and their needs; emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, physical. We pray that we will have the courage to meet again these needs with the same energy and enthusiasm with which we met them last year. Lord hear us. **(Lord graciously hear us)**

Reader 3: The second thing that we begin again with is the work that has to be covered; the specifications that need attending to, the curricula that have to be taught. We pray that we will fall in love again with our own subject areas and that this love will give us the energy to share our knowledge and our enthusiasm with all of our students. Lord hear us. **(Lord graciously hear us)**

Reader 4: Another similarity year on year are the specific needs of students who find school life particularly difficult. This year they may have additional challenges settling back. We pray that as a school, we'll continue to attend to these students with great care and affection. Lord hear us. **(Lord graciously hear us).**

Reader 5: There are a lot of familiar faces again today. And it's great to be back together. We pray for one another; colleagues and friends, that we'll enjoy this year together and do good work together. Lord hear us **((Lord graciously hear us).**

Reader 6: We pray in particular for our colleagues working 'front of house' (Name secretaries, care takers, team of cleaners and so on). Every year we appreciate what they do, but this year, in particular we thank God for their hard work that will help keep us all safe. Lord hear us. **(Lord graciously hear us).**

Reader 7: We pray now for our own special intentions. Lord hear us **(Lord graciously hear us).**

Reader 8: We listen now to the Word of God.

A reading from the Prophet Isaiah

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

or I am the LORD your God
who takes hold of your hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.
Do not be afraid.

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

Principal: We conclude now with a short hymn of blessing. This is my prayer for you at this time and I'm sure it is the prayer many of us have for us all in _____ (name of school)

Just a word about the video: All across the world, various versions of this song were recorded during Lockdown. We're going to hear the one from Lebanon. As we listen, we pray for the people there as they come to terms not only with the Covid 19 pandemic but also the horror of the Beirut explosion. We remember them in our prayers today and pray in solidarity with them in their hour of need.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ818gHiHLO>

