

Prayer Service for the Opening of the School Year

“That all may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10)

A NOTE ON USING THIS SERVICE

This service is written for two settings: a student assembly and the first staff meeting of the year. The core shape — gathering, word, reflection, response, and sending — stays the same for both, so that students and staff can, in effect, be praying the same prayer at the start of the year. Sections marked ▶ STUDENT VERSION and ▶ STAFF VERSION offer alternative wording; use the one that fits, or blend both if the group is mixed. Everything else can be read as printed.

Suggested leader(s): for an assembly, the school chaplain, a member of the Religious Education department, or a senior student together with a staff member; for a staff meeting, the principal, deputy principal, or chaplain. A candle, a copy of the school’s mission statement or CEIST Charter, and this year’s theme (if the school has chosen one) placed centrally help set the tone.

Approximate time: 12–15 minutes.

1. GATHERING

The group gathers. A candle is lit, ideally by a student and a staff member together. Quiet music may play as people settle.

Leader: We gather this morning at the start of a new school year. Whatever brought each of us through the door today — excitement, nerves, tiredness, hope — we bring all of it into this moment. Let us begin, as we begin so much in this school, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

2. OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Loving God, you make all things new. As we open this school year in [school name], we ask you to bless this community — every student walking in for the first time or the sixth year running, every teacher preparing a room, every member of staff who keeps this place working. Give us the courage to begin again, the patience to grow, and the grace to see one another as you see us. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

3. WORD

A reader proclaims the chosen passage from a Bible or Lectionary. Two suitable options are given below — choose one, or another passage more familiar to your school community.

Option A — Jeremiah 29:11–14

God’s promise to a people starting afresh: “For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to give you hope and a future.” The reader proclaims the full passage from Scripture.

Option B — Matthew 5:13–16

Jesus calls his followers salt of the earth and light of the world. The reader proclaims the full passage from Scripture.

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

4. REFLECTION

Read the version suited to the gathering. A short pause for silent reflection may follow, or the questions may be put to the group aloud.

► STUDENT VERSION

A new school year is a fresh page. Maybe you're starting 1st year and everything feels big and unfamiliar. Maybe this is your last first day here, and that feels strange too. Wherever you are, today is a beginning — and every beginning is a chance to become a bit more of who you're meant to be.

CEIST schools try to hold onto four things in particular: faith, that there is more to life than what we can measure; justice, that every person deserves fairness and dignity; care, that we look out for one another, especially anyone who is struggling; and community, that none of us gets through this year alone.

Take a moment now to think of one person you could look out for this year — someone new, someone quiet, someone who might need a friend.

► STAFF VERSION

Every September asks something of us that isn't in the job description: the willingness to begin again, generously, even when we're carrying tiredness from the year before or worry about the year ahead. It is worth naming that teaching and working in a school is, whatever else it is, a vocation — a way of loving young people into their own possibility.

The CEIST Charter asks us to root our work in faith, justice, care, and community. Practically, that might mean: the patience we show a student on a difficult morning; the fairness we insist on in a staffroom conversation; the colleague we check in on; the culture we build together, one small decision at a time.

Take a moment now to name, quietly, one way you hope to show up for this school community this year.

(Pause for quiet reflection.)

5. RESPONSE

Leader and group alternate, or all read together.

Leader: Lord, at the start of this year,

All: open our eyes to see one another clearly.

Leader: At the start of this year,

All: open our hearts to welcome the stranger among us.

Leader: At the start of this year,

All: open our hands to the work you give us to do.

Leader: At the start of this year,

All: walk with us, every ordinary day of it.

6. INTERCESSIONS

A response may be used after each petition, e.g. "Lord, hear us / Lord, graciously hear us." Select petitions appropriate to the group, or use both sets for a combined gathering.

For students starting a new year, or a new school — that they find friendship, courage, and a sense of belonging, we pray to the Lord.

For staff beginning the work of this year — for energy, patience, and support for one another, we pray to the Lord.

For anyone in our community who is anxious, grieving, or finding this year difficult to face — that they know they are not alone, we pray to the Lord.

For CEIST and all who lead and serve Catholic education in Ireland — that our schools remain places of faith, justice, care, and community, we pray to the Lord.

For our own intentions, spoken or held quietly in our hearts ... (pause) ... we pray to the Lord.

Leader: Loving God, hear the prayers we bring today, spoken and unspoken. Walk with this school community through all that this year holds.

All: Amen.

7. THE LORD'S PRAYER

All are invited to join hands or simply stand together.

Leader: Let us pray together in the words Jesus gave us:

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.

8. CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: God of new beginnings, bless this school as we open another year together. Bless our students in their learning and their growing; bless our staff in their teaching and their care; bless our whole community in the work we share. Help us to be, for one another, signs of the faith, justice, care, and community we hope to build here. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

9. BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all harm, and lead us in peace this day and every day of the year ahead.

All: Amen.

The candle is extinguished (or left burning if the meeting continues). The group disperses, or a closing hymn / piece of music may be played.

Adapt freely for your own school community, theme, and readers.