

# Living Faith



Dear Friends in Christ,

It is 'Back to School' time! I love when everyone gathers on the first day of Sunday School. While we try to stay connected over the summer, it is hard to find everyone in one place. So on the Sunday after Labor Day, there they are, ready to learn and tell the stories of the adventures they had during the summer. By now I am sure you are well into planning for fall and looking for people who are gifted and willing to serve as leaders for faith formation programs such as Sunday School, Confirmation, After School Programs, and Adult Ed programs.

This is the perfect time to recognize the gifts of talented Faith Formation leaders, faith milestones, and the vocation of public educators.

A few years ago we started celebrating our three year old starting Sunday School with a "Graham Cracker" banquet. We served frosted crackers, fruit kabobs, and juice. The room was decorated with balloons and colorful plastic table cloths. Parents and special guests were invited. This was a great time for parents to meet the teachers and the church staff. This is also a time when parents could meet each other and talk about the joys and challenges of parenting. The kids were much less apprehensive about coming when they knew that mom or dad was sitting behind them. At worship that morning they were all invited to come forward for a blessing and receive a gift. It was an amazing day.

This is a great time to recognize Seventh graders and their parents as they celebrate entering Confirmation. Invite them to be blessed as well. During the blessing, lift up the Covenant that you are using as important and have the parents enroll their child into the time of confirmation. How Powerful! Our kids are so important and such a vital part of the Church TODAY.

Blessings!

Elayne Werges, Diaconal Minister  
St Paul-Wellsburg & Bethany-Iowa Falls

It is the time things like Sunday School, after school programs, Confirmation, youth groups, Cross-generational family fun nights, and adult education will be starting again! Yippee!



## RALLY SUNDAY

What are we doing for Rally Sunday this year? If you haven't heard it yet, you probably will. Rally Sunday is when all the Faith Formation programs start again for the year. It can be said that Rally Sunday sets the tone for the rest of the year.

Here are some ideas of things your congregation can do. And by the way...no congregation is too large or small to do these things, it just takes a small group of committed individuals to plan and organize the activities.

- ♥ Maybe change up the name this year and have a Back to School Bash! Invite parents and grandparents. Have games and activities that will preview some of the events that you will be doing this year.
- ♥ Have an installation of faith formation leaders, see the example on the back.
- ♥ Have a pot luck lunch or supper at the church. Play games or have a challenge...if your budget allows rent a bouncy house
- ♥ Invite the neighbors for a drive in movie or a hay ride. Take the opportunity to talk about all the cool things that are happening in your congregation.
- ♥ Invite members of the congregation to be prayer partners with the children and the youth. Print kids names and baptismal anniversary on the cards that will be distributed. Exchange cards and notes through the year. Sometime during the year have a day where you celebrate prayer partners.
- ♥ Teach children stewardship by upcycling offering envelopes. Black out the old number and put a sticker on the front.
- ♥ Celebrate Baptismal Birthdays once a month at Sunday School opening. Give a small gift of token.

This information has been prepared for you by the  
**Northeastern Iowa Synod-Home Life Network**  
for use by families and local congregations. For more ideas about  
how you can pass on faith in your homes go to:

[http://www.neiasynod.org/synod\\_resources/YouthFamilyResources.asp](http://www.neiasynod.org/synod_resources/YouthFamilyResources.asp)

If you have a comment or suggestion for future newsletters or are interested in joining the Home-Life Network please contact the synod office or contact Elayne Werges at  
elaynewerges@gmail.com



# Installation of...

Sunday school Teachers, Youth Group Advisors,  
Confirmation Leaders, After School Program Leaders,  
Education/Faith Formation Teams.

**Leader:** For all those who looked forward rather than back.

**Congregation:** Lord, We give you our thanks.

**Leader:** For the pioneers and the explorers, for all those who opened up new world for the dwelling places of your human family.

**Congregation:** Lord, We give you our thanks.

**Leader:** For the discoverers who have added to the safety and the comfort of our lives. For the adventurers of faith who have been a cloud of witnesses to all those who come after.

**Congregation:** Lord, We give you our thanks.

**Leader:** Let us offer our prayer together

**All:** O God, You are Light and the Truth. Open our minds that we may follow the paths you have laid out. Open our hearts and keep us from distraction as we are in your presence. We thank you for the quiet courage of our Savior Jesus who lived as an example and died that he might bear witness to your love. We pray that you will help these leaders to follow where God leads and to be an example of Christian living. Be with us as we adventure into the future. Accept our prayer in Christ's name. Amen.

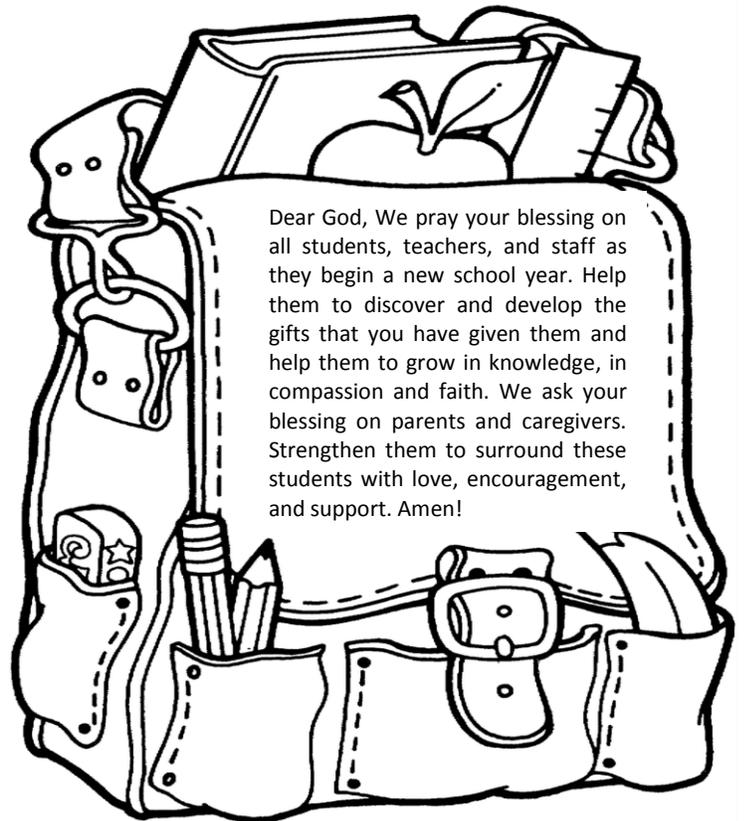
**Leader:** Teachers and Leaders, Do you promise to love and respect the children in your care, to love and serve God, and teach students to the best of your ability. If so answer: I will with the Help of God.

Congregation, Do you promise to support these leaders with the resources they need, pray for them, and encourage them? If so answer: We will with the Help of God.

**Leader:** You are sent to proclaim and teach the Good News of Jesus Christ and to love and serve your neighbors.



# Blessing of the Backpacks



Dear God, We pray your blessing on all students, teachers, and staff as they begin a new school year. Help them to discover and develop the gifts that you have given them and help them to grow in knowledge, in compassion and faith. We ask your blessing on parents and caregivers. Strengthen them to surround these students with love, encouragement, and support. Amen!

Blessing of the backpacks is a great way to start the public school year. First of all it tells our kids, their teachers, bus drivers, and lunch ladies that the work that they are doing is important. This blessing can be done at home by using the prayer above. Try to gather as a family before everyone leaves in the morning or the night before. Talk about the hopes and challenges for the year and how your family can work together to accomplish your hopes. Close your time by praying together. If your church holds a blessing be sure to include faculty, administration, staff, bus drivers, and AEA staff members. Also it is fun to include college students, graduate students, college staffs, and recognizing the life work of retired school personnel.

Provide a remembrance of the occasion such as a key ring or a trinket that has an inspiring message on it such as "God Loves You". These can be placed on or in the backpack so when the recipient sees or touches it they will remember that their church family loves and cares for them. There is a copy of a blessing on the Northeastern Iowa Synod website at: [www.neiasynod.org](http://www.neiasynod.org)