

Education Sunday 2005

23 JANUARY 2005

The ninth Sunday before Easter is traditionally set aside by all the Christian Churches as Education Sunday

A More Excellent Way

1 Corinthians 12.31

Schools, colleges and universities are under constant pressure to improve their performance and fulfil new requirements. League tables, inspections, tests and exams are used to measure academic success. This approach to education can encourage unhealthy competition between institutions and undermine our responsibility to help individuals achieve their full potential. Is it any wonder that the joys of learning and teaching are so often overshadowed by high levels of stress?

But there is another way. Right from the start of his ministry, Jesus challenged our attitudes to ambition, success and power. He recruited a team of ordinary people to be his disciples with whom he lived and worked. Jesus taught them and empowered them to share the Gospel with others. This relationship was characterised by co-operation and mutual support.

What can we learn from Jesus' way of working that we can take with us into the world of education? Are there things we can do to improve relationships between teachers and students, between colleagues and between institutions? How can we create a more caring and supportive environment where everyone is valued?

Christ guides and teaches us still, promising to be with us at all times – in times of anxiety and disillusionment and in times of success. He asks us to take his love to those we work with, through support and prayer. Let us work together creatively as we seek to follow him.

Prayers

Servant Lord,
a stable marked your entrance and your birth,
the world took little notice of your life,
a city in despair brought forth your tears.
Your war-horse was a donkey through the streets,
a bowl and towel the sign of kingly reign,
and on a villain's cross you died
before you lay within a borrowed tomb.

When we seek power and influence, status and renown,
remind us, Lord.
Servant Lord, remind us.

God of wisdom, on this day, and knowing it to be your purpose that all your children should grow in understanding and truth, we pray for all those involved in education:

for all teachers and lecturers whose work shapes the lives of others;
for all chaplains in schools, colleges and universities who offer pastoral care and seek to interpret the purpose of education in daily life;
for children and students, that learning may be a joy, and gaining knowledge a source of happiness;
for administrators, that care and efficiency may go hand in hand;
for all involved in the whole task of education,
that it may be devoted to justice rather than self-seeking,

equality rather than privilege,
and creation of community rather than division.

We ask this in the name of him who as the Way directs our path, as the Truth is our purpose and goal, and as the Life is the very spirit by which we live.

For well over a hundred years there has been an annual recognition of Education Sunday in England and Wales. It is a national day of prayer and celebration for everyone in the world of education. The theme is devised by an ecumenical steering group representing different Christian denominations.

For some years it has been celebrated on the ninth Sunday before Easter. The ideas in this leaflet are intended to be used as a springboard for a variety of events on or around Education Sunday. If you feel unable to devote a whole service to the theme on Sunday 23 January why not use some of the ideas on another occasion?

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (1 Corinthians 12.31 – 13.1 RSV)

Suggested Hymns

- Brother, sister let me serve you
- Let there be love shared among us
- Make me a channel of your peace
- May the mind of Christ my Saviour
- All I once held dear
- Lord, I come to you
- The Church's one foundation

Prayer Points

- Young children going to school for the first time
- Children moving from primary/middle schools to secondary schools
- Students going on to further and higher education
- Adults embarking on new learning experiences

Recommended Readings

Isaiah 9.1-4
Psalm 27.1,4-9
1 Corinthians 1.10-18
Matthew 4.12-23

Seed thoughts for sermons/talks

PSALM 27

The world can be a troubling place – full of worry and fear. What brings us a sense of lasting peace and security? In what or whom do we really trust? League tables? The media? Politicians? Friends? Retail therapy?

Or, to put it another way: if we could ask God for one thing (anything!) what would we ask for? Would we, like the psalmist, ask if we could “dwell in the house of the Lord” all the days of our life? Would we think to ask if we could “gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple”? (Psalm 27.4)

Even though the psalmist earnestly seeks God he still feels threatened and vulnerable in the face of his enemies. It is sometimes tempting to take an “if you can’t beat them, join them” attitude when confronted with the injustice, hatred and exploitation we see around us. The psalmist resists the temptation to ask to be as powerful and ruthless as his oppressors. On the contrary, he pleads: “Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path ... Do not hand me over to the desire of my foes.”
(Psalm 27.11-12)

The psalmist resolves to trust in God and spend time with him. So should we.

The psalmist resolves to follow God’s righteous plan – a more excellent way for his life – and rejects the ways of cruel and wicked people. We should do likewise.

Something to celebrate together

Celebrate and support teaching and learning in your community using this liturgy on Education Sunday. Teaching and learning take place in many different ways and in a variety of settings and so the following framework has been designed to be adaptable. It could, for example, form part of an order of service, following the sermon and ending with the Peace.

The term ‘teacher’ is intended in its broadest sense to include those involved in working with people of all ages and in both statutory and voluntary education.

Invocation

After three days they found Jesus in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. (Luke 2.46)

Commission

The leader invites all involved in schools, colleges or universities in whatever capacity and in children’s, youth and adult work to stand or come forward.

God by his grace gives gifts to all his people. You have been given the gift of teaching, sustaining and encouraging young people. Will you do all that you can to enable that gift to grow and flourish in you and to use it for the transformation of lives?

All: With the Lord’s help we will

God by his grace calls us to work for him in a variety of ways. Will you listen to his call on your lives and faithfully live out your vocation?

All: With the Lord’s help we will

God by his grace has called you to be a Christian witness in your school, your home, your Church and your workplace. Will you promise to be a faithful witness to your Christian calling?

All: With the Lord’s help we will

Lord Jesus, the source of all knowledge and truth, give to all who teach and encourage young people, wisdom, strength and compassion in all they undertake and grant that all who learn may be open to your transforming power: for your sake. Amen
Learning to live is such a wonderful but difficult business, Lord:
Learning to know and to understand,
Learning to love and to care.
We so often fall short,
But you prompt us to try and try again.
So, bring us to that day
When we know as we are known
And love as we are loved,
The day of the joy of your kingdom.
In the name and grace of Jesus we ask this. Amen

Return to seats.

Intercessions

Father God, We pray for all those who help children learn and grow, at home, in school and in Church. We pray that you will help them to give those you have entrusted to their care, the confidence and eagerness to learn. Lord, we especially pray today for . . .

Lord, in your mercy,
All: hear our prayer

Loving God, We remember those who teach young adults in secondary schools, colleges and youth groups. Give them patience and compassion for those facing the challenges and excitement of their teenage years, helping them to face difficult decisions as they grow in maturity. Lord, we remember especially . . .

Lord, in your mercy,
All: hear our prayer

Creator God, We pray for those who work in Further and Higher Education and who teach adult learners, remembering Chaplains and Christian Unions and their ministry amongst students. We pray that students will be open to your calling as they plan for life after their studies. We remember especially . . .

Lord, in your mercy,
All: hear our prayer

Holy God, we pray for politicians in local and national government who make and administer education policies. We pray for inspectors, advisers and governors. Give them integrity and wisdom. We pray especially for . . .

Lord, in your mercy,
All: hear our prayer

‘Education Sunday should be celebrated in all parishes and the service should actively involve Christian teachers. It should be an occasion when the clergy speak on the vocation to teach and the value the Church places on the work of Christian teachers in all schools.’

Extract from chapter ‘Teachers, Teachers, Teachers’ in *The Way ahead: Church of England schools in the new millennium*, Lord Dearing’s report on the achievements and future development of Church of England schools.

The full report is available on the National Society’s web site www.natsoc.org.uk.

Resources

Pocket Prayers for Teachers by David W. Lankshear; National Society/Church House Publishing.

Churches Serving Schools by David W. Lankshear; National Society/Church House Publishing.

Governing and Managing Church Schools by David W. Lankshear and John R. Hall; Church House Publishing.

‘On the Wrong Track’ from *One Cool Cat & Other Sketches* by Derek Haylock; National Society

‘Lean on Me’ from *A Fistful of Sketches* by Dave Hopwood; National Society

Neighbours and The Broken Leg by Teddy Horsley; Christian Education – formerly NCEC

‘Caring about the team – Christian Sports people’ from *Ready-made assemblies about famous people*; Scripture Union

Notes on the readings from Isaiah, 1 Corinthians and Matthew are available from the web sites listed below.

Leading Education with Christian Purpose

The National Society is a Church of England and Church in Wales education service. It was founded in 1811 to provide education for all. Today The National Society aims to support everybody involved in Christian education and the teaching of Religious Education. The NS works closely with Diocesan Boards of Education, teachers, headteachers, school governors, Church school inspectors, chaplains and clergy, providing information, training and advice.

This leaflet is produced by The National Society.
It is also available on The National Society's web site www.natsoc.org.uk.

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Your support is vital to enable the Society to continue its valuable work in the field of education in the twenty-first century.

Support us:

- By becoming a member of the National Society.
- With your prayers.
- By making our work more widely known.
- By regularly giving or by donating a collection for Education Sunday.
- By leaving a legacy to the Society.

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www.christian-teachers.org
Baptist Union of Great Britain Baptist House, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon OX11 8RT
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The Catholic Church Catholic Education Service, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX
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The Church of England and The National Society Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ www.natsoc.org.uk
Student Christian Movement University of Birmingham, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6LL www.movement.org.uk
The Salvation Army Schools and Colleges Information Service, UK Territorial HQs of the Salvation Army, Newington Causeway, London SE1 6BN www.salvationarmy.org.uk/schools
The Methodist Church Education Office, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JP www.methodist.org.uk/sundays
The United Reformed Church 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT www.urc.org.uk

And next year... Education Sunday will be 12 February 2006