



# Celebrating education: supporting local schools

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## Purpose

The following are some suggestions as to how churches might support their local schools (here focusing mainly on primary schools) and, in the process, help all involved to celebrate the gift of education.

### *Within the life of the local church*

Sunday worship is the most obvious place to affirm and celebrate the life and work of all those engaged in education. Although the annual calendar of many churches includes an 'Education Sunday', celebrating education need not be confined to once each year. There are many other ways to support the work of schools.

- A church could 'adopt' a local school (or schools) and commit itself to supporting it (them) during the year.
- One person could act as a contact with the school(s) to learn about the joys and disappointments faced by it (them) over the year. They could feed back information and ideas to the local church (without breaking confidentiality).
- Prayers of thanksgiving and/or intercession could include pupils and students, school staff and governors of local schools.
- Parents from the congregation could be encouraged to form a group to meet and pray together for the needs of the schools which their children attend.
- A church might host a question-and-answer session about religious education in schools.
- A church might offer its facilities for a public display of school work.

### *Within the life of the school*

Although members of staff try to make the school a comfortable, happy and rewarding environment for their pupils, they are often under pressure to meet the conflicting demands of government targets, hopes of parents, and the needs of pupils. Churches might show their support for schools by offering support in various ways.

- Church members could become school governors, listen to children read, help on school visits or simply 'be around' to talk with and support the young people.
- Churches might offer the services of a 'school chaplain'. This could be a suitably trained lay person and not necessarily an ordained minister.
- Churches might offer to lead occasional school assemblies (see below).

### *Some points to note*

- Where staff members are under pressure, we can best work to support them by listening to them and empathising with them.
- Any personal information we learn about staff and/or pupils should be kept confidential.
- Work with schools should be approached as 'service' rather than 'evangelism'.
- When talking about our faith, we should adopt a non-judgemental approach: not 'You should believe ...' but 'I believe ...' or 'most Christians believe ...'
- We should try to keep our language familiar and simple, avoid 'church-speak' and be prepared to explain what we mean.
- Building links with schools is a slow process and may involve formal checking procedures.

### *Worship in schools*

When leading school worship, it is important to choose tunes that are familiar to children and, where possible, modern words (see below). Children or parents should be involved whenever possible. For example, with the prayer below, children might read each of the 'For's, with a leader reading the opening and closing sentences. Children might also provide a musical accompaniment for the hymns.

## Hymn for Education Sunday

(Can be sung to the tune 'Morning has broken')

God of creation, from the beginning  
You have declared the universe good,  
And you have given into our keeping  
Knowledge to learn and use as we should.

Knowledge brings power, knowledge brings  
freedom;  
Knowledge to use, and knowledge to share.  
We can control and we can bring changes,  
But we must learn to do things with care.

Through work and study, prayer and example,  
We can learn how to best use our skill;  
Sharing the Good News; serving our  
neighbours,  
Building your kingdom; doing your will.

Our education – teaching and learning,  
Growing and changing, all that we do,  
All that we are and all that we will be,  
In humble praise we offer to you.

A. Martin 1998

## Thanksgiving Prayer

Almighty God, we come to thank you for the good things that you have given us:

*For the ability to investigate the past and discover new things today;*

*For the gift of memory – that allows us to store up information from the day we are born;*

*For the privilege of inquiry – that allows us to ask questions and form our own opinions;*

*For the gifts of teaching and training – that allow us to change the world around us, and change and improve our own lives;*

*For the capacity to pass on knowledge from one generation to another – so that we might constantly learn from the past;*

*For the gift of imagination and vision – that enables us to change the present and to shape the future.*

*But most of all we thank you for your love and generosity*

- in leaving the world in our hands,
- showing us your will for the world – through Jesus,
- and helping us to get it right through your forgiveness and the power of your Holy Spirit.

Thank you Lord.

Amen

A. Martin 2004

[This hymn and prayer can be reproduced for non-commercial purposes, free of charge, if accompanied by acknowledgement of the author.]

## Resources

Good sources of prayers, in modern language, can be found in the many books by Nick Fawcett (eg *Prayers for all Seasons*, Stowmarket, Kevin Mayhew, 2001) or Donald Hinton (eg *Called to Praise*, Birmingham, Christian Education, 2005).

See also Trevor Cooling with Mark Greene, *Supporting Christians in Education*, London, LICC, 2008 for some useful ideas.

## Further study

Many books, but begin with David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, revised edition, London, Jessica Kingsley, 2006

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