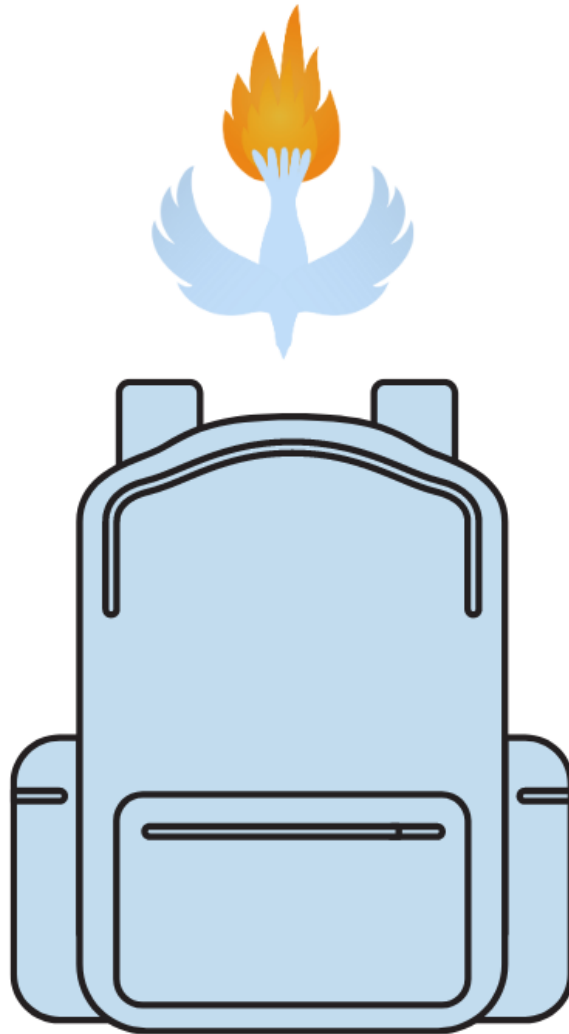


Blessing of the Backpacks



Children hold a special place in the heart of God. In Mark 10:13-16, Jesus embraces the little children, reminding us all to approach God with childlike wonder and trust. Throughout Scripture, children are not only seen as symbols of purity and faith, but also as embodiments of the future of the Church. From the Old Testament, where God declares His plans for us even before birth (Jeremiah 1:5), to the Baptismal Covenant upheld in The Episcopal Church, we are called to nurture and protect children as they grow in their relationship with Christ.

The "Blessing of the Backpacks" is a modern expression of this care and commitment. As students prepare for a new school year, the church pauses to bless not just their physical backpacks but the weight they carry in life—responsibilities, friendships, and the challenges they will face. It's a sacred reminder that God walks with them daily, both inside and outside the classroom. This blessing serves as an ongoing testament to the church's support and prayer for its youth, recognizing the importance of faith in all their endeavors.

Today, and throughout the year, we encourage everyone in the congregation to take intentional steps in building relationships with the youth in our midst:

1. **Build personal connections:** Take a moment to speak with a young person. Ask about their school year, what they're excited about, or how you might be able to support them. Building a personal connection fosters a sense of belonging and community.
2. **Pray for them by name:** Hold the youth in your congregation in prayer throughout the school year. Lift them to God, asking for their courage, wisdom, and well-being, as they grow in faith and navigate the various challenges life presents.
3. **Help bring them to church:** If a family needs assistance, offer transportation to ensure youth can be present in worship. Simply sitting with a young person during the service can show them that they are seen, valued, and part of the larger church community.
4. **Support their activities outside of church:** Attend school events, concerts, or sporting activities when possible. Showing interest in their lives outside of Sunday services builds trust and bridges the gap between their world and the church, strengthening their connection to faith.

By taking these steps, we ensure that the youth know they are loved, prayed for, and recognized as integral members of the church. Let us embrace the call to uplift and encourage them, remembering that "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). Our role is not just to nurture their faith but to walk alongside them as they grow in their journey with Christ, reminding them that they are never alone in God's presence and care.

~ Rev. Bradley Mattson, Rector

The Blessing of the Backpacks

- *Celebrant:*

Beloved! Children of God! It's that time of year again—school's about to start, and we want to make sure you head into it with God's love and our support. Whether you're carrying a backpack, teaching, or just cheering someone on, today we're blessing everyone gearing up for the year ahead.

- *Student:*

Let's hear some wisdom from Proverbs 2:6: 'For the Lord gives wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.'

- *Celebrant:*

If you've got your backpack, bring it on up! If not, come up anyway—we're blessing everyone. Let's get ready to send you into this school year with prayers and love.

- *Celebrant:*

Loving God, thank you for new beginnings and fresh starts. We ask you to bless these backpacks and, more importantly, bless the amazing people who carry them. As they walk into this school year, give them courage when things are tough, excitement when they learn something new, and a sense of peace when it feels like too much. Be with them in every classroom, every test, and every new friendship. And let these backpacks remind them that they're never alone—you're with them, and so are we.

- *All:*

Bless these backpacks and everyone who carries them!

- *Students All:*

God, bless our backpacks. Help us learn, make new friends, and be kind to everyone we meet. Remind us that you are always with us, especially on hard days.

- *Teacher Part (optional):*

God, bless the teachers and all those who help us at school. Give them patience and joy in their work, and help them to inspire us every day.

- *All:*

Amen!

- *Celebrant:*

Go into this school year knowing that God's got your back—and so do we! You're loved, you're brave, and you're ready for whatever comes next.

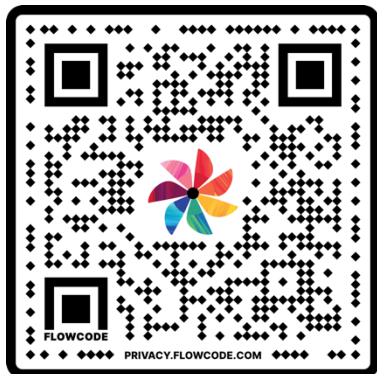
- *All:*

Amen!

The "**Big Way of Love for Kids**" is a comprehensive resource by The Episcopal Church designed to introduce children to the Way of Love—seven spiritual practices that nurture faith and discipleship. These practices include **Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest**, each tailored to a child's experience and understanding. The initiative offers a variety of resources such as story-based videos, activity sheets, prayers, and reflection prompts, allowing kids to explore their relationship with God in a fun and engaging way. Each resource is interactive, aiming to integrate faith into daily life while fostering a sense of love, community, and service to others. Parents and faith leaders can use these tools to help children live out their faith in tangible ways, reinforcing the idea that the Way of Love is a journey we embark on together.



Connecting kids with Jesus is foundational to their spiritual growth and understanding of God's love. When children learn about Jesus, they are introduced to a relationship that offers **guidance, comfort, and hope**. By engaging with the stories and teachings of Jesus, they begin to see how **love, kindness, and justice** are central to their own lives. This connection fosters both **faith and action**, as kids are empowered to live out the values Jesus taught—caring for others, praying regularly, and trusting in God's presence. As they grow in their faith, they become more confident in navigating the challenges of life with a grounding in Christ's teachings, knowing that they are never alone and are part of something greater. This early introduction to Jesus' message **plants seeds of love and transformation**, which will continue to grow throughout their lives.



You can explore these resources and learn more about **The Big Way of Love for Kids** here.