

# Equipping for ...

## Commissioning Church Educators

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In secular contexts, we often hear the word “commission” in reference to a government inquiry or commissionaires as a security force. “Commission” is a word that often implies that something has gone wrong. In a sacred context, however, our immediate association is to Jesus’ great commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” Our English word “commission” has Latin roots and means “sending together.” It is from this need to commission our leaders that a commissioning service is a very important part of who we are as Presbyterians.

We often take for granted the amazing lay leadership in congregations. Christian educators are often among those who are overlooked, despite how vibrantly they are living out their baptismal vows. It is

important to take time to honour those who hold a position of leadership and offer thanksgiving for them and their gifts. It is also important to encourage the congregation to take an active part in programs of education. Many commissioning liturgies are exclusively for Sunday School teachers; however, this liturgy is focused on *all* church educators and the members of the church. This includes Bible study groups, discussion circles, youth and young adult leaders or even our choir instructors as well as our fantastic Sunday School teachers. In some of our congregations we recognize that we don’t have Sunday School programs. That does not mean we ignore those who lead our adult programs! Feel free to use the commissioning service for those folks as well.



This liturgy is focused on the spiritual gifts articulated primarily in Romans 12. It explores the historical stories of teacher-leaders within the faith community and refers to our baptismal vows to nurture faith growth. One can use all of the liturgy to shape the entire service or take the commissioning portion and use it during a children's time or following the offering, as a symbol of offering ourselves, not just our monetary donations. There are brief sermon notes about the suggested Scriptures but the liturgy is open enough that one can find passages that suit the needs of the specific congregation. In fact, feel free to adapt the liturgy as appropriate. May God bless all of our amazing laity who make serving in a Christian community enjoyable, authentic and full of energy!

## Liturgy for a Commissioning Service

### Call to Worship:

One: God calls each of us to lead using the gifts given to us;  
Many: Some to be prophets, some to work miracles, some to encourage and some to teach.  
One: There are different kinds of gifts,  
Many: but the same Spirit!  
One: There are different kinds of ways to serve God,  
Many: but one God to serve and worship!  
All: Let us worship God together.

### Prayers of Approach:

Wonderful God, we rejoice in your grace and your love. We adore you with hearts, minds, bodies and souls, and are moved to offer you our worship and praise. You are a God who leads and calls us, who loves and sustains us, who teaches and enlivens us, through your Word, guidance, and Holy Spirit. We confess that sometimes our desires and our behaviours pull us away from you. We ignore your call, put down those we love, find ways to hate and turn to superficial sustenance. We ask for your mercy and grace.

### Assurance of Forgiveness:

Through Christ, we have been born anew into a life of hope, becoming an example of God's compassion. With assurance we can say that we are a forgiven people. Thanks be to God!

### Children's Time:

Take some time to talk about what Christian commissioning means—being sent out and being entrusted with a certain task—then follow with the commissioning liturgy.

OR talk about our different talents (even share a talent with the children) and direct the discussion to our spiritual gifts. Refer to the group of talented folks who serve as our Church educators and Sunday School teachers. One can go into the commissioning service or have the Sunday School return following the offering for the commissioning.

### Preamble to the Commissioning of Church Educators

In the sacred story of our faith, women and men have always been called by the One who is the source of truth and wisdom to guide and teach God's people. In the First Testament we are called to pass down God's commandments to our children and to speak about God's law constantly. At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus commissioned the disciples to go out into the world to teach and preach the Good News. Today, we celebrate people who have responded to God's call and we joyfully commission the educators of our congregation as they use the gifts they have been given to lead and guide our Sunday School, Bible studies and classes.

*Invite the teachers and Christian education leaders to come to stand before the congregation (either at the front or in their seats, depending on mobility).*

Through Christ and by the Spirit, God has given each of us gifts with which to serve the church and the world. We are blessed by teachers and leaders who use their gifts in creative and faithful ways, and they stand before us now, ready to begin a new year of service. With deep gratitude for the blessings we receive through the service of these people, we commission them for service as Christ has called them.

### Commissioning Questions

Do you promise to prepare your programs with hearts and minds open to the leading and inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

We do.



Do you promise to carry out this work with enthusiasm and joy, patience and courage, trust and love?

We do.

Do you promise to trust in God's guidance, ever seeking to learn as you lead, to listen as much as you speak, and to walk with people with faith and authenticity?

We do.

*Ask the congregation to stand and answer the following question:*

These teachers and leaders have a vital role in the nurturing of our faith. Will you support them with prayer, encouragement, interest and compassion?

We will!

*Address the children*

You are a very important part of our congregation. Thank you for being here! We have a question for you. Will you participate with enthusiasm and joy and will you bring your questions with you as you explore with your teachers God's incredible love for you?

We will!

*If the Christian Educators are at the front and if there are enough children (or invite some of the Bible study participants), have them create a circle around the Christian Educators as we prepare to pray for them.*

### **Prayer:**

Guiding God, you have made us all with our own special gifts. Like a body that has many parts, we are a community with many parts. We thank you for all the ways in which you interact with our lives. Today, we ask for your presence with our teachers—those who serve by helping us to go deeper with you. We thank you for each one of them—for the ways in which they illumine your Word, expand our horizons and endure our curiosities.

May each of them be granted wisdom, patience and confidence. May their reliance be placed in you but also may they feel encouraged by us.

Inspire us to take the time to participate in Christian education so that we too can live out our baptismal vows—to mature as Christians in the church and to engage in God's mission to the world.

As your Spirit works among us, remind us of our need to learn more. Help each of us to recognize our gifts so that the world may know your love and compassion. Guide us as we represent you to all who we meet. Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour are yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

*Invite the children and ruling elders to come up and extend the right hand of fellowship as a sign of our gratitude to our Christian educators or have those sitting around them extend gratitude.*

### **Scripture Suggestions**

Numbers 11:4-25

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 18:1-5

### **Sermon Notes**

God answered Moses by appointing leaders in the community and resting God's spirit upon them. They then began to prophesy. Just the word prophesy can be an intimidating one. But if we understand prophets to be people who remind the community of their covenant with God (as opposed to people who can foresee the future) then our Christian educators are indeed prophets. We usually use this passage to talk about our ruling elders but, as post-Pentecost people, we recognize the Spirit has descended upon the whole community.

The Romans passage helps us to expand our use of the gifts of the Spirit. Being a prophet, teacher, encourager, giver, leader and caregiver are parts of a whole. They also happen to be all good traits for a teacher. As amazing and wonderful our Church educators are, they likely only have some of those gifts, which is why it is important for them to work as a team—and for all of us to work in community.

Matthew's passage is brief but rich and highly condensed. It says much about how Jesus valued and welcomed children, how children were travelling with the disciples (i.e. families would have been attending



his teachings together) and how each of us can teach and learn in awe and with passion for God's wisdom.

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Creator, redeemer, sustainer, we thank you for all the gifts you have given us! We thank you for the world around us, for the wonders found in your creation—the gentle patter of rain and the piercing light of a sunny day. We thank you for the gifts in our lives and the joys we find in community, and the redeeming love of your son. We thank you for the prophets, the encouragers, the generous givers, the caregivers, the leaders and the teachers. We thank you for... (name the Christian educators who were commissioned). Grant them the motivation and inspiration to lead and be led by your Spirit.

Help us all to discern our gifts and how they can be used for the building up of this community and your church.

Teach us to love one another—help us to bear one another's needs and provide the basic necessities of life.

Teach us to forgive one another—help us to be agents of peace in this world and serve you by lifting up the oppressed and exploited.

Teach us to serve one another—help us to show kindness, humility and grace.

May we live out your call for all of us to live in the unity of the Spirit through Jesus Christ. Amen.