



## Backpack Milestone

Many congregations have found the blessing of backpacks to be a very meaningful way to mark the passage of summer. It is a helpful transition for children, youth, and adults to the new fall schedule. It is also an opportunity to discover God's presence with us at home, school and work, and to be reminded that Jesus is always with us.

Going to school for the first time or returning to school for another year carries with it the challenges, anxieties, hopes, and opportunities that fill the lives of children, parents, and other caregivers with many diverse emotions and wonderments. Therefore, it is a prime time to acknowledge our dependence upon God and God's goodness, recognizing that God's steadfast love endures forever and even right now! This Milestones Ministry event can address the fears and uncertainties of child and adult alike. It can offer the much-needed words of Jesus, "have no fear," and provide a way to begin the year and each school day with the Four Keys that nurture the Christian faith: caring conversations, devotions, service, and rituals and traditions.

We bring children, parents, and other adults together to recognize this time of the year by providing the opportunity to bless backpacks by incorporating a simple structure that includes:

**Naming** – It is important to recognize this time of year as the end of summer and the beginning of new, and sometimes hectic, schedules for families.

**Equipping** – All ages are given the opportunity to practice the Four Keys and have time to take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and claim values and faith that establish and direct our lives beyond the fears, anxieties, and pressures of life.

**Blessing** – The blessing of the backpacks allows us not just to imagine, but also to experience the larger picture of life—the one that says life is not dominated or formed by pressures and uncertainties.

**Gifting** – You may give a gift as a physical reminder of this occasion, such as a zipper pull or key chain. (See Appendix 1.)

**Reinforcing** – It is a good idea to follow up after the Backpack Milestone by connecting this group one more time to share stories about how their school year is going. The Backpack Milestone Follow Up is on page 7.



Caring  
Conversations



Devotions

Four Keys  
for  
Practicing Faith



Service



Rituals and  
Traditions



# + Milestone Event for Small Groups or Home

There are times when celebrating a milestone can be done in a small group setting or more intimately in homes. Take time to enjoy a meal or dessert together and to invite conversation with the following outline. You may also wish to use portions of a Cross+Generational Event found in this Backpack Milestone.



## Caring Conversations

Begin with conversation:

- One of the highlights of the summer was \_\_\_\_\_.
- Now that summer is over, I can't wait for \_\_\_\_\_.



## Devotions

Read Deuteronomy 7:11 (CEV)

*So be sure to obey his laws and teachings I am giving you today.*

God made promises to our ancestors. He loves us and is with us always. He gave them and us a commandment to keep his words in our hearts and recite them to our children. In school, we don't have commandments. We have rules.

- What rules do you have in your school?
- What happens if you break the rules?



## Service

Our lives are filled with learning. We learn through many social contacts. We learn at school, in the home, in the congregation, on the job, through various media, and in the community.

- Make a commitment in the next month to be of service by helping someone else learn.
- Be a "book buddy" at school or help somebody learn how to run a computer program at work or develop a skill with a tool.



## Rituals and Traditions

Prayer:

*Lord, you have blessed us to be a blessing to others and grow in wisdom. Help our lives to reflect your grace and will as we serve you. We ask this in your name. Amen.*

Bless one another: *"May you obey His laws and teachings."*

*Resources and tools to encourage faith talk and faith practices in the home are helpful and remind us that home is church, too!*

A suggestion for building rituals and traditions in the home:

## 4 Key Faith Practices Mat



Place a candle in the center

Place a blessing bowl in the center



Add a milestone to the bowl to encourage caring conversations

