

Celebrating and marking milestones

Resources and ideas for events, celebrations, services and more

As the long days of summer begin, for many, they mark the end of one chapter and the start of something new: moving class, changing schools, a new job role, children moving away, moving home, retirement. So many transitions take place in the summer months. Our church communities can be places where we create space to recognise and mark these milestones, allowing people to transition well.

Beyond the walls of the church, our increasingly secular society is looking for rituals that help us celebrate and process change and loss, and lead us to connect spiritually. The Church has long held this space, guiding communities through celebrations and rites of passage, and with a little creativity you can offer this to your wider community. Families in your community may not attend church regularly, but they may welcome the time and space to mark transitions and pause to reflect and be grateful together. Rituals involve simple yet profound words and actions, often with physical and symbolic actions that help us make meaning, embed our lives into a larger story, and mark a change.

Many transitions centre around school life. This can be a moment where church, school and parents/carers together can intentionally mark these milestones. Be mindful to find ways to include those not currently in school or who are homeschooled.

As you mark milestone moments, include those not in this phase of life. Encouraging the church to come together as an intergenerational community to support and pray for each other creates a pattern for the future (see also our Intergenerational series on [WEB](#)) and a sense of God with us in transition times.

Below are a number of ideas to mark transition for different groups. All the ideas are flexible and can be altered to fit a variety of ages and settings. (In the activities below, 'this place' has been used to cover a range of settings, like a school or a life stage). Together mark these milestones – whether at the end of the academic year, or in the quieter summer holiday weeks – reminding your community that God is with us, each day, wherever we go (Matthew 28:20).

Something from the Bible

Deuteronomy 31:6 As we explore times of change and transition, these words from Moses form a focus. Moses is about to hand over the leadership of the Israelites to Joshua, but first speaks to the Israelites. This is a key moment of change and transition, and Moses reminds them that God will always be with them whatever changes follow. Moses then repeats these words as he speaks to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:7-8)

Philippians 4:1,4-9 Paul encourages these Jesus followers to keep making good choices in their lives, learning from the good examples they have seen. And we are assured that the God of peace will be with us wherever we go.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 The wisdom writer reminds us that times and seasons change, but what God does lasts for ever.

A read and share idea

These music videos set the words from these Bible passages to song, to help with memorisation.

Deuteronomy 31:6 bit.ly/3AT0IL5

Philippians 4:1,4-9 'Do not be anxious' bit.ly/4g1OgHL

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 'Turn, turn, turn' by the Byrds bit.ly/4eNzHXk

Alternatively, you may want to use these traditional worship songs about trusting God: 'What a Friend we have in Jesus', 'Be thou my vision', or the contemporary hymn 'The Blessing'. bit.ly/3CKNgJO

Milestone activities

Bubble blessings

With younger children, mark the moving on to nursery or school. You could provide the children with a certificate, small gift, or card. Ask all the children (whether moving on or not) to stand together. As one leader reads the blessing below, ask another to blow bubbles over the children.

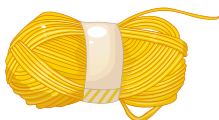
God has blessed you in this place.
God will bless you in the new places you go to.
God will bless you wherever you are. **Amen.**

Write the blessing onto card, attach it to pots of bubbles and encourage the parents/carers to use this blessing at home.



Woven together

As older children or young people move schools or classes, create a weaving frame.



Cut an A3 'picture frame' from card or use an old picture frame. Fix wool or string vertically and horizontally across the frame to create a mesh to weave through. Provide long lengths of brightly coloured wool or ribbon. Remind the group that though some may be moving on and others staying, they have all been a vital part of *this place*. Ask each person to weave the wool or ribbon through the frame as they think about all that has happened in *this place*. Display the weaving as you read the words from Deuteronomy 31:6.

Moving on

Use this reflection with groups, including young people moving away. Tell the group that when we move on, something of us remains. Ask everyone to take a stone and write a word or draw an image to symbolise them. Say: 'As you hold your stone, thank God for *this place*. Take your stone and either now or as you leave, place it somewhere outdoors. A sign that 'all that you are' has been important here.'



Continue saying: 'As you leave, something of *this place* goes with you'. Pass round a basket filled with something for everyone as a reminder of *this place*. These could include a holding cross, Bible verse, prayer card or something particular to your group. Finish by praying a blessing over the young people.

Candlelight

Milestones are often marked by lighting candles. In a gathered context, celebrate those at a key milestone. Light one large candle and provide everyone with small candles in a safe candle holder. Invite everyone to light their candle from the main one.



Once all the candles are lit, read Deuteronomy 31:6 and pray:

As we move through times of change and transition,
God is with us.
May we be bold and strong,
confident that God goes with us.
Amen.

Blessings bags

Create Blessing bags for adults with children making a significant move this summer. Include details of items in the bag and the words from Deuteronomy 31:6.



Below are some ideas for contents to include in the Blessings bag. Add your own, to reflect the group:

A tea bag – Make a cup of tea, sit down and thank God for the good times you have had together.

A small notebook – to use as a prayer or reflection journal. Write or draw your prayers and thoughts, for you and your child, through this transition period.

Pieces of coloured card – for younger children, write an encouraging note and place in their lunch box.

Prayer sheet with two prayer prompts – 'Tell God what you will miss most about *this place*' and 'Share what you are most excited about in the new place'. Encourage your child to tell God how they are really feeling.

Individual reflection



This can be used by individuals within a gathered context or given to people to complete alone.

Take a sheet of paper and some coloured pencils. Focus on the sights, sounds and images of *this place*. Select colours that remind you of these and colour all over the paper.

Think of five words or phrases that define *this place* for you. These could include items, feelings, events or memories. Take a pen and write these across the paper.

Listen to the words from Deuteronomy 31:6.

Look at your paper as you thank God for *this place*.

Fold it up and take it with you as a reminder of all *this place* has been, as you move on to the new.

Difficult transitions

Transitions and milestones can be difficult for some, or people may wish to mark them alone. If this is the case, find ways in which the church community can provide appropriate support, both pastorally and practically.

Follow-up ideas

If possible, set aside some time to see how people are finding their new stage/milestone. Think of simple ways that the wider church congregation can support individuals through these transitions. For example, you could send cards or texts to show that you are thinking of them, or invite individuals to join in activities that are relevant to the change they are experiencing.

