

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH



AUGUST 30, 2015 - FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (B)

BLESSING OF BACKPACKS

As the summer winds down and the school year begins, Episcopal congregations across the country are blessing backpacks, gathering school supplies, and enjoying other activities that bring us back together.

At St. Luke's Episcopal Church in North Little Rock, Diocese of Arkansas, students of all ages can receive a blessing upon their backpacks at a Sunday service. Rev. Joanna Seibert of St. Luke's said the purpose of the service is to honor children as they go back to school. "It's to let them know that the church community is praying for them and it's recognition that the children are a part of our community. It's to let them know they are not alone." Not only does the congregation participate in a blessing of the backpacks, but the congregation also fills backpacks for a local food bank that distributes food to school children in backpacks each day.

Christ Episcopal Church in Poughkeepsie, NY, Diocese of New York, in collaboration with Freedom Plains United Presbyterian Church, Lagrangeville, NY, distributes backpacks filled with school supplies to local school children during the annual event, "Backpacks, Supplies and More." The event takes place on the Christ Church campus which is transformed for the day with face painters, bouncy houses, a fire truck, a police dog, and more. In addition, the Poughkeepsie-Arlington Rotary cooks free hamburgers and hot dogs for all who attend the fun-filled event. Donations from both congregations and local community partners are used to purchase bulk school supplies, plus donations in the form of supplies are given by local residents, county employees, and local businesses. In its eighth year, this ministry builds connections within the community, and helps students to be prepared for a successful and joyful school year.



Photo: St. Luke's Episcopal Church, AR

Does your congregation participate in backpack stuffing for the community or host a blessing of the backpacks? If so, share your photos and story with The Episcopal Church here: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/form/photo-submissions>.

Prayer for returning to school written by Wendy Claire Barrie, Director of Children, Youth & Family Ministries at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, New York City:

God of Wisdom, we give you thanks for schools and classrooms and for the teachers and students who fill them each day. We thank you for this new beginning, for new books and new ideas. We thank you for sharpened pencils, pointy crayons, and crisp blank pages waiting to be filled. We thank you for the gift of making mistakes and trying again. Help us to remember that asking the right questions is often as important as giving the right answers.



Today we give thanks for these your children, and we ask you to bless them with curiosity, understanding and respect. May their backpacks be a sign to them that they have everything they need to learn and grow this year in school and in Sunday School. May they be guided by your love. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, who as a child in the temple showed his longing to learn about you, and as an adult taught by story and example your great love for us. Amen.

Photo: Trinity Episcopal Church Fort Wayne, IN