

Ideas for Finishing

A liturgy for ending

Materials: lengths of fabric in seasonal colours (green [two lengths], blue, purple, red, white, gold or yellow); pillar candle, matches, selection from a current Seasons Music CD (suitable as a blessing song), CD player, tealights, taper

Sing or listen to a closing, blessing song from a current *Seasons Music CD*.

Say, "Today is the ending of a journey. During this past church year we have explored Bible stories about Jesus and other people who have told us about God's love and care for us. We have been part of a community, learning about each other, and learning how to be disciples. These pieces of fabric remind us of all the different seasons of the church year that we have travelled through together."

Ritual Name each season of the church year (perhaps beginning with the season just completed) and lay a length of fabric in the worship space:

The Season of Advent (*blue or purple fabric*)

The Season of Christmas (*white or gold fabric*)

The Season after the Epiphany (*green fabric*)

The Season of Lent (*purple fabric*)

The Season of Easter (*white, gold, or yellow fabric*)

The Season after Pentecost (*red fabric, and then green fabric*)

Light the candle and say, "This candle reminds us that God is with us and we do not travel alone."

Pray Invite children and/or youth to each think of one thing that they enjoyed about the last year (or season) together. Distribute the tealights. One person begins by using a taper to light a tealight from the central candle while offering a sentence prayer. For example, "I give thanks for..." (friends, a certain activity, a highlight of the time together). The other group members take turns lighting their tealights from the person on their right and offering their own sentence prayers.

Blessing Invite children and/or youth to stand in a circle and hold hands, or link arms, or put a hand on the shoulder of the person next to them. Take turns saying the following blessing (or one that is traditional in your community) to the person on the left:

(Name), God loves you.

(Name), God bless and keep you.

(Name), go in peace.

Reflecting on discipleship (*for older children and teens*)

Preparation: print the following passages on strips of paper: Psalm 16:7–11; Romans 12:15–17; 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Galatians 5:22–25; Philippians 4:4–6; 1 Thessalonians 5:17–22.

Distribute the verse strips among the participants. Invite everyone to read their verses and think about what their scripture readings say about being a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. Invite those who wish to share their thoughts with the whole group.

Arrange the verse strips radiating out like rays around the lit candle in the worship space.

Pray: "O God, thank you for this community of disciples. We have worked and played, listened and talked, written and read together. Be with us and guide us in the days and weeks ahead. Help us to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Amen." (Alternatively, say together the Prayer that Jesus taught.)

Endings around holy days

The church school year may end around the time of a holy day or special celebration, such as Reign of Christ Sunday (at the end of the Season after Pentecost) or Pentecost Sunday (at the end of the Easter season). Plan a church family picnic, catered dinner, potluck, or theme meal on one of these days. Play some intergenerational games together. Review the year in a creative way by having each group present one of their favourite activities, games, songs, or projects to remember the highlights of the past year.

Review covenants

At the close of a time together it is important to reflect on your life in community. If your group created a covenant together take some time during one of the last sessions to review the covenant. Think about the activities, discussions, struggles, and joys during the past year. Then take turns reading aloud each section of the covenant, naming ways it has been reflected in your life together.

Design games

Invite children and youth to design a game to review themes of the past season or past year. Use a television quiz show format or design a board game (perhaps a "human size" board game using masking tape on the floor with people as the "markers"). Children and youth might form two groups to create games to challenge each other.

View the scrapbook

If your group has been able to record the activities of the year in some fashion, take time to review and reflect on the highlights of the past year. Notice some of the favourite activities or projects. Invite parents and others to view or listen to your "scrapbook."

Outreach festival

At the heart of faith formation is service: serving others on behalf of Christ. Celebrate the end of the Christian education year by having an Outreach Festival. This kind of activity gives learners of all ages an opportunity to teach others about outreach and justice issues that are important to them. Children and youth can set up booths to provide information about service projects or justice issues they have learned about or been involved in during the year. Include carnival-like games and donate the money collected from the games to a service project or special offering.

Keeping in touch

Find ways to keep participants connected with each other while church school or youth groups are not meeting.

- Keep in contact through e-mail.
- Send a "round robin" letter or e-mail that each person reads, adds information to, and sends on.
- Plan a mid-summer event for the group to attend.
- Send a letter or postcard to each person in your group.
- Have each person choose a "mystery" name and match names together. Design a "mailbox" and leave it at the church. Encourage "mystery pals" to send each other mail during the summer, until church school or youth group meets again. Plan a way for mystery partners to meet at the end of the break.

