



Working On Worship (16)



Blessings for Birthdays

In Collective Worship, it is always appropriate to give thanks to God. The Bible says God is the giver of all good gifts but this may seem especially so on the occasion of a birthday, when the act of physical giving is so evident.

Birthdays:

- mark a beginning, a new year of life with ourselves, others, and God
- create a real chance to look back with thanks, and ask God's guidance for the future
- give an opportunity to acknowledge and give thanks to God as the author and giver of life, the one who knows us all as individuals.
- make an appropriate occasion to express love and thanks to our parents and family who have shared the gift of life and love with us.
- represent a chance to share good things with friends, and to give thanks to all who help us on our way through life.
- provide a very special opportunity for a child to know that they are special to God as well as their family and their school friends.

Birthdays in school may be celebrated in a variety of ways including singing 'Happy Birthday' in assembly. However, it can also be an opportunity to pray for or bless the children



whose special day this is. It is worth considering how to incorporate a thanksgiving or blessing into Collective Worship as well as your usual practice. This can become a tradition in your school and something the children learn to look forward to in a very natural way.

Some simple possibilities:

1. **Add an additional verse when you sing 'Happy Birthday to you':**

**God bless you today,
God bless you today,
God bless you and keep you
today and always.**



2. **Offer the birthday child a blessing.** Children were brought to Jesus when he lived on earth; their parents wanted him to bless them. We can ask God to bless our pupils on their birthday; it is a bit like the giving of a gift. It is traditional in several cultures to place a hand on someone's head or shoulder as a blessing is given. In some schools all the children are invited to help with the blessing by lifting up a hand towards the child whose birthday - giving a blessing from a distance!

Some words to use as a blessing:

May God who loves us all, fill your life with joy on this your special day and be with you forever.

OR

**May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May he look upon you with kindness and give you his peace.**

3. **Read a special prayer for the birthday child.** This can be done by the headteacher, an older child or the class teacher.
4. **Celebrate all the birthdays in one month at the same time.** Bring all the children to the front if possible and sit them on a bench throughout worship. Pray for them at the start. Give each child a Christian bookmark or a birthday card with a scripture verse in it if possible, as a physical reminder of their special day being remembered in assembly. Publishers like the Kevin Mayhew make



Christian birthday cards for children. <https://www.kevinmayhew.com/>

If you choose a particular prayer, a school birthday card could be printed with the prayer in it, maybe a different one for each key stage. Have a competition to design these.



Examples of possible prayers:

- Thank you, God, for xxxxxxxx on his/her birthday. Thank you for the special blessings you've given to him/her (*insert specific talents, qualities, or gifts of birthday person*) that make him/her unique. May he/she learn to walk in the light of your love, this birthday and always. Amen
- Heavenly Father, we praise you for all your gifts to us. In a special way today we thank you for xxxxxxxx. Bless him (her) always with your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
- God of all creation, we offer you grateful praise for the gift of life. Hear our prayers for xxxxxxxxxxxxE, who recalls today the day of his / her birth. Bless him / her this day and surround him / her with your love that he / she may enjoy many happy years, all of them pleasing to you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
- Loving God, you created all the people of the world and you know each of us by name. We thank you for xxxxxxxxxxxx, who today celebrates his / her birthday. Bless him / her with your love and friendship that he / she may grow in wisdom, knowledge, and grace. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen
- Thank you, Father God, for giving xxxxxxxxxxxx another year of life. Thank you for all the people who remembered him / her today by sending cards, and letters, gifts and good wishes. Thank you for all his/ her happy memories of this past year. Thank you that you will be with him/ her in the difficult and sad times too. Help NAME in the days ahead to make this the best year yet,

and through it to bring credit to him / herself, happiness and pride to his/ her family and joy to you. Amen.

- On this your special day, xxxxxx, we pray for you. May this day and all your days be filled with the wonder of God's great love for you. Happy Birthday. xxxxxxxxxx.... We thank God for your life and ask for a new year filled with God's peace and love.
- Watch over your child, xxxxxxxxxx, O Lord, as he / she continues to grow; bless and guide him/ her wherever he / she may be. Grant that he/she may grow in wisdom and grace, and learn to trust in your goodness. Strengthen him / her and comfort him / her when things are hard. May he / she know that you love him / her always, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- God our Creator, the birth of your child Jesus brought great joy to Mary and Joseph. We give thanks to you for xxxxxxxxxx whose birthday we celebrate today. May he / she ever grow in your faith, hope, and love. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Two Special Notes:

1. There are several cultures in which individual birthdays are not celebrated for a variety of reasons. If you develop a particular tradition in school, do ask parents, especially **Jehovah's Witnesses**, how they would like this handled for their child. It is important to be sensitive to others' needs while at the same time not depriving other children of the opportunity of a blessing or a prayer on their own special day.
2. Some schools are now incorporating '**Blessings of Backpacks**' as a start of the year custom when all the children bring their school bags to church the Sunday before term starts for the minister to bless the bags and, more importantly, the children and adults working in a school. This custom could also take place on the first day of term.



Picture ~ "Blessing the Children" ~ paper collage by Joanna Harader