

Catholic Education Week 2024
Prayer Services and Reflection Activities for 2023-2024

ADVANCE KIT



**"If we love one another, God lives in us."
(1 John 4:12)**

*"If we love one another, God lives in us." 1 John 4:12
«Si nous nous aimons les uns les autres, Dieu demeure en nous.» 1 Jean 4, 12*

www.goodnewsforall.ca

Catholic Education Week 2024

Catholic Education: *We are called to love*

L'éducation catholique: *Appelés à aimer*

May 5 – May 10, 2024

Guidelines for Using the Advance Kit

What is Catholic Education Week?

Each year the Catholic community of Ontario engages in a week-long celebration of the unique identity and distinctive contributions of Catholic education during Catholic Education Week.

What is the theme of Catholic Education Week?

This year's celebration entitled, "**Catholic Education: *We are called to love***" is scheduled for the week of May 5 – May 10, 2024. The scriptural passage that guides our theme is, "*If we love one another, God lives in us.*" 1 John 4:12

What is the Catholic Education Week Resource Kit?

For a number of years, OCSTA has developed and distributed a school-based Resource Kit of activities, prayer services and suggested resources based on the theme of the particular year. The Resource Kit is sent to Catholic school communities early in the new year to assist them in their Catholic Education Week activities.

What is the Catholic Education Week Advance Kit?

In order to help all Catholic educational partners engage in prayer and dialogue in preparation for Catholic Education Week 2024, OCSTA has prepared an Advance Kit of prayer services and reflection activities. Unlike the Resource Kit that is designed for students, the Advance Kit, sent early in the school year, is designed to help adult groups (trustees, school board staff, school staff groups, parent groups, parish groups, associations, etc.) reflect on the theme of Catholic Education Week with prayer services and reflection activities beginning in Advent and concluding in the month before Catholic Education Week.

What are the sub-themes of Catholic Education Week?

The Advance Kit has five prayer and reflection activities for the five months preceding Catholic Education Week, each activity reflecting one of the five sub-themes of Catholic Education Week:

Advent:	As people of hope ... Dans l'espérance
January:	As people of faith ... Dans la foi
February:	As people of mercy ... Avec compassion
March:	As people of justice ... Dans la justice
April:	As people of joy ... Dans la joie

How can the Advance Kit be used in a local Catholic educational community?

Each service may be used to begin a meeting or gathering, or to provide an opportunity for the adult partners in a local Catholic education community to discuss the themes. The prayer services include:

- Prayers that reflect the theme
- A scripture reading that connects with the theme*
- A personal reflection related to the scripture reading
- A theme-related reading taken from the contemporary Catholic spiritual writings
- Questions for discussion or reflection based on that reading

Does the format of these prayer services always have to be followed?

The Advance Kit is a gift to be adapted and utilized in whatever way suits the needs of your local community. Feel free to use all, or any part of the kit, in the five months prior to Catholic Education Week 2024, beginning in Advent 2023.

What approach should be taken to the discussion?

The Advance Kit is designed in Catholic education to help adult groups to sit down together to pray and reflect. In discussing the reflection questions found in this Advance Kit, it is important to allow for the divergent views and experiences that may emerge. Reflection sharing or discussions should be conducted in a gospel atmosphere of respect. Conflicting points of view should be heard and accepted without feeling the need for them to be resolved.

How can we help prepare for future Catholic Education Week activities?

OCSTA encourages all its partners to let us know about your group's use of this Advance Kit by sending an email to OCSTA at the following email address: ocsta@ocsta.on.ca.

The Catholic Education Week Committee would also be pleased to receive your feedback on this Advance Kit as well as suggestions to improve its value to our partners in Catholic education. These and all other Catholic Education Week materials are available on the OCSTA website at: www.goodnewsforall.ca.

*Note that the scriptural reading has been provided for your convenience, however, scripture should normally be read from a Bible or Lectionary.



Advent 2023

“As people of hope”

SUGGESTED OPENING SONGS

- O Come, O Come Emmanuel - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZggySBroc>
- Come Jesus, Prince of Peace - <https://youtu.be/UaWX-k11GWo>
- Maranatha, Lord Jesus - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhrsSTXXNFg>

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God,

We enter this Advent season with hearts full of hope.

In this time of preparation and planning, we thank you for the hope, peace, joy and love you unfailingly offer us.

Let our lives be inspired by the power of hope as we welcome Jesus into our hearts once again.

Prepare our hearts to be transformed by your joy, that we may walk in the peace and light of Christ as people of hope.

Amen.

LITANY OF HOPE

God of hope, your Son has shown us the way to love ourselves, others, and you.

His life has been our greatest example of selfless love.

As people of hope, may we...

All: Inspire our youth to look ahead and grow with optimism.

As people of hope, may we...

All: Fuel our own positive outlooks for our future endeavours.

As people of hope, may we...

All: Feed our souls with the promise of everlasting life.

As we prepare to remember the birth of Emmanuel during the Advent season, may our hope...

All: Show us our true connection as faithful members of God's family.

As we wait for the promised coming of Emmanuel, God with us, God for us, God in us.
May our hope...

All: Lead us ever closer to everlasting life in God's kingdom through the love of his Son, our Redeemer and King, Jesus Christ, whose coming we await this coming Advent. Amen.

And may almighty God bless us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us remain in the peace of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

READING: Mark 13:33-37

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey: when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with a particular task, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else, he might find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you, I say to all: Keep awake!"

The Gospel of the Lord. *R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

This Advent rather than pass the time by simply checking off the days in a calendar, how can you seek to encounter Jesus in the opportunities this season offers?

In this season of preparing our hearts, what are some actions that you could adopt?

Examples of Personal Advent Practices

- Think of ways to bring a spirit of hope to your community.
- Receive the Sacrament of Confession. God is waiting to encounter us in this Sacrament of Mercy.
- Pick some spiritual reading – a book about the life of a saint or open the Bible and reflect on scripture.
- Find a ministry that needs help. Perhaps a volunteer opportunity like a soup kitchen, or a parish or youth ministry program – and spend some time bringing Jesus to those who are most in need.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

The response to the petition is: *R. Come, Lord Jesus.*

For the Church throughout the world, awaiting the coming of Christ in glory.

We pray to the Lord. *R.*

That leaders of government may find instruction in the Word of the Lord and work tirelessly for that justice which is the foundation of peace.

We pray to the Lord. *R.*

For those who inhabit spaces of poverty, depression, or loss in the midst of Christmas joy, that they are given gifts of comfort and hope to ease their darkness.
We pray to the Lord. **R.**

That we may welcome Christ into our hearts and embody Christ in our actions and in our words.
We pray to the Lord. **R.**

For the consolation and healing of all persons who bear with ill health, that they and their loved ones trust our God for whom all things are possible and for those who have died recently... that they be crowned with everlasting joy.
We pray to the Lord. **R.**

For the intentions we hold in the silence of our hearts...
We pray to the Lord. **R.**

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God,

Grant us strength to be people of hope.

May we continue to be strengthened by the light of hope that shines from our advent candle.

God of hope, who brought love, peace, and joy into this world, always be the centre and the focus of our lives.

God of hope, we seek you.

May your hope fill our hearts and grace our lives so that we might reflect your hope for all the world.

Amen.

SUGGESTED CLOSING SONGS

- Ready the Way by Curtis Stephan - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GGd6n5g8bo>
- O Come Divine Messiah - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TM4bX9t_jU
- Hope for Everyone by Matt Maher - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-ThP8qEio4>



January 2024
“As people of faith”

SUGGESTED OPENING SONGS

- Holding On by The Brilliance
- Whom Shall I Fear by Chris Tomlinson
- Faith by Jordan Feliz
- Let it Be by The Beatles

OPENING PRAYER

Good and loving God,
We need your help to be strong in our faith.
You have given us this gift of faith, may your love continue to enrich our spirits so that we may bring the Good News to all those we meet.
We make this prayer in Jesus’ name.
Amen.

READING:

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, and said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has epilepsy and suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.” Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.” And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured from that moment. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”

The Gospel of the Lord. *R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Have you ever experienced a time when you tried to do something on your own, and then realized that you needed help from another person or God?

How has your faith in God helped you to “move a mountain?” Have you experienced a difficult situation or challenge where your faith got you through it?

Does it surprise you that we only need the “faith of a mustard seed” to overcome our difficulties and challenges?

A mustard seed needs water, good soil, and sun to grow. What can you do to grow your faith?

CONTEMPORARY READING

The word faith is often understood as accepting something you can't understand. People often say: “Such and such can't be explained, you simply have to believe it.” However, when Jesus talks about faith, he means first of all to trust unreservedly that you are loved, so that you can abandon every false way of obtaining love. It's a question here of trusting in God's love. The Greek word for faith is *pistis*, which means, literally, “trust.” Whenever Jesus says to people he has healed: “Your faith has saved you,” he is saying that they have found new life because they have surrendered in complete trust to the love of God revealed in him.

Henri Nouwen

Show Me the Way: Daily Lenten Readings

QUESTIONS FOR GUIDED REFLECTION

How does your own faith reflect your trust in God's love?

What makes it difficult to trust in God's love?

Where was God's presence evident in your life this year?

How can you bring God's love to your family, friends, students, and colleagues?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God,

Strengthen Your gift of faith in us.

Please help us to have confidence in Your goodness and Your faithfulness.

Help us to overcome life's challenges and lead us along the path You have prepared for us.

May we find courage and peace in Your love, and may our faith in You serve as an example for others.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SUGGESTED CLOSING SONGS

- Testify to Love by Wynonna
- Hold on to Love by Jesse Manibusan



February 2024
“As people of mercy”

SUGGESTED OPENING SONGS

- Open the Eyes of My Heart by Paul Baloché – Lord, Lift Up Your Hearts #537
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idQ1n3cdgfo>
- Loving and Forgiving by Scott Soper – Glory & Praise #413
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qo73k3yGX5Y>
- A Listening Heart by Bob Hurd
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uT36Zn73tWc>

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God,

May we embrace the call to love in a deep and profound way so that we can be examples of mercy and compassion to others.

Fill our hearts with compassion, kindness and forgiveness, so that we may reflect your boundless love to those around us.

May we be instruments of your peace and reconciliation in the world.

Amen.

READING: Colossians 3:12-17

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Colossians.

Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

The Word of the Lord. *R. Thanks be to God.*

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

In this letter to the Colossians, St. Paul offers us some specific qualities with which we are invited to “clothe ourselves” in order to love as people of mercy:

Compassion
Kindness
Humility
Gentleness
Patience
Tolerance
Forgiveness and
Peacefulness

Which of these qualities am I able to reflect most easily? Which ones do I find most challenging? Which one of the qualities would others (friends, colleagues, family members, students, etc.), say I reflect very well?

How do we as a school community promote and affirm these qualities in our interactions with one another?

Consider the importance of forgiveness. How does holding onto a grudge affect our spiritual and emotional wellbeing? Is there someone I am struggling to forgive? What might help me let go of resentments so that I can forgive as Christ forgives us?

READINGS

“Mountaineers, as they climb mountains, sing a very beautiful song whose words go like this: “in the art of climbing, it is not important that you do not fall down, but that you do not stay down. If you are weak, if you fall, look up a little for there is Jesus’ hand extended to you as he says: “Rise up, come with me.” And what if I fall again? Rise again. And what if I fall yet again? Rise yet again.”

-Pope Francis, World Youth Day, Poland, 28th July 2016

“You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified. You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error; let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.”

-excerpted from Pope Francis, Prayer for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, 2016

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What implications can these readings have for you and your relationships with others at school/work? At home? In your parish? What implications can they have for your relationship with God? How might these readings be a source of comfort or hope for someone who is struggling?

How can mercy inspire us to rise up again when faced with challenges or setbacks?

How can God’s compassion, grace and love inspire you in word and deed to be the visible face of God in your community?

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God,

Help us live out in our daily lives, the mercy which you constantly extend to all of us.

As you cast open the doors of your heart to us, may we respond with urgency to proclaim your mercy to others.

May we always be credible witnesses to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

May we never tire of extending mercy and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort.

May we become the voice of every man and woman and repeat confidently without end,

“Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.”

(Ps. 25:6)

Amen.

-Adapted from *Misericordiae Vultus*, papal bull of induction proclaiming the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy

<http://catholicismobilizing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/jubilee-prayer-for-mercy.pdf>

SUGGESTED CLOSING SONGS

- Your Grace is Enough by Matt Maher – Spirit and Song, Volume 9
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpYtYYaTFGQ>
- Love One Another by Bob Dufford, SJ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j00nL_6oAPQ
- There's a Wideness in God's Mercy – In Balilone, CBW II #443
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmm6IAarriw>



March 2024

“As people of justice”

SUGGESTED OPENING SONGS

- Be Not Afraid by John Michael Talbot – CBW II #714, Gather #263
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oSiX1WKg4w>
- You are Near by Dan Schutte – CBW II #706
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6QwtsDN4xA>

OPENING PRAYER

God of love and infinite wisdom,

Instill in us the courage it takes to learn, unlearn, and re-learn to seek the truth and guide us into action.

Inspire us to serve those who are not always affirmed.

Please provide us with empathy and foresight as servant leaders to support and empower one another.

As we embrace your wisdom to strive towards reconciliation, let us unite as one body in Christ.

We ask this through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, one body forever and ever.

Amen.

READING: Corinthians 12:12-13, 24b-26

A reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians.

One Body with Many Members

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

The Word of the Lord. *R. Thanks be to God.*

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

What does Christian justice authentically look like to you? Sound like? Act like?

Reflect on a time where you have suffered with someone who is suffering. How did you exemplify Christian justice to care for those in need?

Reflect on a time where you rejoiced with those being honored. How did you exemplify Christian virtues to celebrate their joy?

CONTEMPORARY READING

From Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical letter Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship

“A love capable of transcending borders is the basis of what in every city and country can be called ‘social friendship.’ Genuine social friendship within a society makes true universal openness possible.” (Fratelli Tutti, 2020, No. 99)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What are some of the borders/barriers that are surrounding us that need to be transcended?

What does social friendship look like to you in order to live a life of justice and hope?

How do you see a society of true universal openness lived out in your school community?

INTERCESSIONS/PRAAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Let us pray for those in equity-deserving groups who seek justice and reconciliation.
For them, we pray to the Lord...

Let us pray for the conversion of heart of those who oppress and marginalize others.
For this, we pray to the Lord...

Let us pray for our own daily witness that we may contribute to the work of shaping a more just and inclusive society.
For this, we pray to the Lord...

CLOSING PRAYER

God of Renewal and Hope,
You call us to serve others and seek justice for humanity.
Give us the perseverance and the courage to build a more equitable and inclusive society, both in our schools and in the world around us.
We ask this through Christ our liberator and companion.
Amen.

SUGGESTED CLOSING SONGS

- Glory & Praise to Our God by Dan Schutte – Gather #233
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7GiWZG-AI4>
- We are Called by David Haas
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgomtIc1_yc



April 2023
“As people of joy”

SUGGESTED OPENING SONGS

- Joy from the Rend Collective
https://youtu.be/VDiETOLBvxA?si=trLA5p7J_b-tQtwz
- You are Joy by Warr Acres
<https://youtu.be/PL6o9HNbbv0?si=ZeaNLaga7hFij2SS>

OPENING PRAYER

God our constant Companion,
Your unfailing presence in our lives is the source of our deepest, lasting joy.
Far beyond moments of fleeting enthusiasm or exuberance, to know that you are with us brings us a spiritual joy that struggles cannot rob us of – the joy that comes from knowing how much you love us at every moment.
Make that joy radiant in our lives, and may it overflow into love for every person we encounter, and especially for those who may need our love in a special way this day.
Praise to you, Lord, Giver of Joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

READING: Isaiah 12:5-6

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

“Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

The Word of the Lord. ***R. Thanks be to God.***

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

What does an authentically joyful Christian look like to you? Sound like? Act like?

Sometimes we can (even unconsciously) communicate a version of Christian faith that is sombre, grim and joy-less. How does genuine joy contribute to evangelization?

What moments of genuine joy have I experienced this week that I want to thank God for?

CONTEMPORARY READING

From Pope Francis' 2013 exhortation "On the Joy of the Gospel" (Evangelii Gaudium)

There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize, of course, that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. The most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR GUIDED REFLECTION

A beloved Christian carol begins with the line, "Joy to the world: the Lord is come!" If, as Pope Francis suggests, Christian joy flows from God's coming to us in Jesus, how can I ground myself more deeply in my relationship with Jesus?

Like Pope Francis, many people have noticed how some of those who seem to experience joy most profoundly are also those who often lack worldly riches and "things." What do you think is the relationship between joy and living a life of Gospel simplicity?

The Holy Father says that joy adapts and changes at different stages of our lives. As you look over your life so far, what did joy look like when you were a child? What made you joyful? How are your ideas about joy different today? What brings you genuine joy today?

INTERCESSIONS/PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Let us pray for those who journey with depression and mental illnesses that can make it hard for them to experience joy: that they will receive the best of support and care and be accompanied by loving family members and friends. May a restored sense of joy be God's gift to them.
For this, we pray to the Lord...

Let us pray for our loved ones, who bring us joy by their presence, their words, their kindness, and their actions. May we cherish all the special people in our lives, and respond with love, gratitude, and generosity.
For this, we pray to the Lord...

Let us pray for our own daily witness to the Good News. May God's unshakeable love for us inspire the kind of joy that others will recognize in us, and may it draw others to experience the same gifts we have received from our faith.
For this, we pray to the Lord...

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord,

In a world often cloaked in sorrow and fear, you offer us the joyful news of your forgiveness, your care, and your love.

Root us always in that joy, and help us to lift the burdens of others, and to build up a world in which more and more people have opportunities to flourish and reasons to rejoice.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SUGGESTED CLOSING SONGS

➤ One of the best-loved and most exuberant musical pieces celebrating joy is Beethoven's 1785 "Ode to Joy" from his Ninth Symphony. Even without understanding the German lyrics, you can enjoy the soaring musicality and energy of this flash mob version from 2012
<https://youtu.be/kbJcQYVtZMo?si=SnTL0Mj1zXJQsVaQ>