Opening humor:

1. Teacher to student, “What are you – animal, vegetable, or mineral?” The boy replied, “Vegetable. I’M A HUMAN BEAN.”
2. The teacher said, “Why don’t you brush your teeth? I can see what you had for breakfast this morning.” Boy, “What did I have?” Teacher, “Eggs.” Boy, “You’re wrong! THAT WAS YESTERDAY!”
3. On Johnny’s first day of school, the class was to put their right hands over their hearts and repeat the Pledge of Allegiance. The teacher watched the children as he started the pledge, “I pledge allegiance to the flag...” She stopped when she noticed Johnny’s right hand over the left side of his rear end. “Johnny, I will not continue until you put your hand over your heart,” the teacher said. Johnny replied, “Ma’am, it is over my heart.” After several attempts to get Johnny to put his hand over his heart, the teacher asked, “Why do you think that is your heart?” “Because whenever my Granny visits, she picks me up, pats me here, and says, ’Bless your little heart!’”

Aren’t children the best of us? They make us laugh, cry, yell, love, and fear (so much for their well-being) in ways we could never have imagined without them.

I believe children are the best of us. They are a precious gift from heaven—all of them, no exceptions. They remind us of goodness and love, teach us patience and resilience, and make us smile and laugh.

Today we are here to bless them and all those who take care of their formation and education: parents, educators, school staff, and communities like this.

So, how much does Jesus care for and love children? The apostle Mark tells us a story of when children were being brought to Jesus by their parents and grandparents, and how people around Jesus and Jesus himself reacted to that. This is Mark 10:13-16,

“People were bringing little children to him in order that he might [bless] them; and the disciples spoke harshly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was furious and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.”

In this story, we learn that children were being brought to Jesus by their families so he could bless them. However, some people decided Jesus shouldn’t be bothered by that and shooed them away. Perhaps they thought it was an unimportant task, and Jesus had more serious business to attend to. So, they decided Jesus was too busy to bless children.

However, Jesus heard the conversation and interjected by saying, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” The Scripture tells that Jesus was very upset with what was happening; he did not mind his words to make clear that children are welcome into God’s Kingdom. So, instead of sending the children away, Jesus invited them back, took them in his arms, and embraced them. But he also put his hands on them and gave them his blessing.

With this action and his statement, he made clear the worth of children, “theirs is God’s Kingdom.”

So, does Jesus care about children? What do you think? This story highlights the importance and care Jesus places on them. Children are God’s Kingdom people. This means that by taking care of children, whether at home, school, or church, we are doing what Jesus would do.

If you are a parent or grandparent who cares for your children and is helpful and nice to other children, you are doing Jesus’ work. If you are an educator who cares about children’s development and success, you are doing Kingdom work too. In many ways, you are like Jesus to our children. We bring them to you, and you welcome and look after them. You have a great power to bless them. So we want to thank you and bless you for all you do for all of us, for making our homes, churches, and world a better place by helping us teach our little ones.

As we can see, the well-being of children transcends religion, politics, or any other concern we may have. The well-being of children unites us—parents and educators, churches and school staff—to make the world a better place for them, us, and everyone.

Sadly, we live in a world that’s getting more and more dangerous for children and everyone else, and we need to be more attentive and engaged than ever in the well-being, safety, and development of our kids. I say this because it is no longer uncommon to hear stories of horrific violent events in our communities and schools. For this, one of the greatest gifts we can give to our little ones is peace and safety, so their only worries are homework and chores.

This means we have a great task to work together to keep people, particularly our children, safe so they can grow and find fulfillment. We need to be intentional in teaching them between right and wrong and show them how to choose right—and I say “show” because they learn mostly by following in our footsteps.

This is an enormous and privileged task; no one can do this alone. We need parents, teachers, and churches, to work together to nurture their hearts and minds by passing on to them our knowledge, values, and faith so they can overcome the wrong and evil in this world with goodness. We need to work together for every child’s wellness and readiness to take on the challenges we face so our future may be better than what we have right now.

The African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” conveys the idea that it takes many people (“the village”) to provide a safe, healthy environment for children, where they are given the security they need to develop and flourish, and to be able to realize their hopes.

Here at New World, we are that village with all of us joining in making the best of life to keep our people safe and blessed. Together, we are privileged and responsible for building and supporting such a village. As a parent of two sons and a pastor that looks after many children, I understand this concept very well, and I hope and pray all of us here share the same concern so we can be a good village together—parents and educators, church and school staff.

So, here is the invitation and good news: the invitation is to join arms, become a shield to protect our little ones, and foster the best environment we can so they can grow to be good people. And the good news is that Jesus is leading the way; we are not in this endeavor alone; we have each other and Jesus.

My friends, this is Kingdom work. We are the village.

Blessing

I invite all the children to come forward along with teachers and school staff. As a church and community family, a village, we have the opportunity today to stand with all of you and make a statement that we are in this together and we give you our blessing.

MK and Ashley,

[MK] Dear God, you are our Teacher, Creator, and Guide through life’s classroom. As we begin a new school year, we ask for your blessings on our students, parents, and teachers.

[Ashley] We thank you for **pens and pencils**held by big and little fingers as they learn to write their names, thoughts, and stories. We thank you for the **crayons, markers, and** all the bright colors in the world around us.

[MK] We thank you for the **calculators and rulers** that help us to add and subtract, multiply and divide as we learn to work with numbers, shapes, and how the world works.

[Ashley] We thank you for **notebooks, folders and binders**, handouts that teach us our letters and numbers, and blank pages we can fill with our thoughts and stories. We thank you for our **lunch boxes**, filled with food to help our bodies and minds grow strong and mighty.

[MK] We thank you for the **books**we read, the books that teach us our history, the books that teach us who we are, and the books that open up magical worlds of possibility. We thank you for our **backpacks**that carry everything we need.

[Ashley] We thank you for our **teachers**, who fill our children’s minds with knowledge, nurture their spirits, and protect them while in their care. We thank you for our principals, counselors, custodians, nurses, classroom aides, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers. May they receive the support and honor they deserve as they live into their calling to educate this generation.

[MK] We thank you for our **parents**, grandparents, and other childcare providers who support and encourage their students in all that they do, and who spend countless hours helping with homework, volunteering in classrooms, and driving the carpools.

[Ashley] We thank you for our **students**, for the blessing that they are to us. Strengthen their bodies, minds and spirits throughout this school year so that their knowledge might grow and their imaginations soar with new thoughts, achievements, and dreams.

We pray in the name of Jesus, the Great Teacher. And all God’s children said, **Amen**.

Congregational prayer (led by pastor):

Good and Gracious God, bless our children, teachers, school staff, and every family with excitement and hope for this new school year. We pray for their safety, happiness, and well-being in this new school year.

Give families energy, strength, and discernment as they raise their children. Fill their homes with joy and their hearts with love. Remind them that we, their community and church family, are here to support them.

Give teachers wisdom and encouragement. Fill their classrooms with learning and compassion. Give them focus, patience, and creativity as they educate these children.

And, Lord Jesus, who welcomed the children and held up their faith as an example, bless now these students. Fill their schools with community and their hearts with wonder. Develop within them wisdom, integrity, and maturity as they learn and grow this year.

Amen.