

Disrupted Milestones

Opportunities to lift up and acknowledge milestones that will be missed this spring

Whether you are meeting in real time or virtually, when recognizing milestones, it is important to be intentional about the process in order to bring meaning to the event for young people. As you read the suggestions below, think about these four aspects of recognition and ritual:

1. Gathering together: Who will be invited, how will they be invited, how will we begin the gathering/meeting?
2. Making it personal: How will we tell the story of the person and explain the event/milestone?
3. Ritual: What action will culminate the recognition? Will there be a presentation, a song, a prayer, a gift? Think of how that milestone will be enacted in ritual for those who are gathered.
4. Closing the gathering: How will things wrap up, so they don't dwindle? Think of the event from start to finish so it is meaningful and focused.

Senior Sunday/Graduation Recognition:

- Create an iMovie and recognize Seniors. Ask seniors to submit 3-5 photos each (childhood, senior photo, photo of family, etc.), and include group photos from mission trips, retreats, conferences, and other church activities.
- Ask parents, previous mentors, pastors to record messages of encouragement and celebration addressing seniors and include throughout video.
- Post video on church website and promote on other social media platforms the week before previously scheduled graduation date(s).
- Create a Senior Faith Book of their four years that includes pictures of church events and trips, group photos from their high school careers, confirmation class pictures, teachers/mentors names, confirmation class members and date of service, pictures of who the church staff have been during their four years of high school, a photo of the church, highlight significant studies, service projects or other big youth events, photos of typical youth meetings. Print pictures and descriptions on cardstock and put in a soft-sided binder to be kept at the church or sent to the students. Or make this into a digital scrapbook and set up a zoom call or Facebook Live event to share with the congregation/senior class.
- Ask the congregation to send encouraging notes to the seniors.
- If a senior "gift" is given, consider dropping it off at each home with a personalized note.
- Make sure to obtain permission to share photos/video to wider audience when posting on website/social media.

At Home Graduation Recognition:

Set up an online meeting with the parents of seniors to offer ways to recognize their graduate through the entire month of May.

- Make a “fathead” or print off a large picture of your graduate and hang it from your front door or place in a plant on your porch.
- Hang your students cap and gown in the front window of your home.
- Place sidewalk chalk out front and encourage neighbors to leave notes of congratulations or encouragement for the graduate.
- Create a “Remember When” board where family members spend the week before graduation was to occur remembering events, moments, funny stories, struggles and triumphs of the soon-to-be-graduate that are read out at a special celebration meal.
- In a similar vein, use an empty jar or can and have family members, friends, and neighbors write ‘Prayers for tomorrow’ that include hopes, wishes, dreams and prayers for the future. People can email these to a parent, and they can be printed out and put in the jar.
- During the week that graduation was to happen, turn your home into a celebration space with tablecloths, napkins and other festive ways of using school colors and school mementos.

Birthdays

Parties and celebrations have been cancelled or postponed, so help them recognize these big days!

- Send birthday cards to students who are celebrating during the quarantine.
- Text a “happy birthday” video to the youth on their birthday.
- Organize car parades for youth. Include the parents in this decision, so they can send their student outside during the appropriate time frame.

Prom

- Set up a virtual prom for your seniors and juniors via Zoom. Pick a “fancy” background. Ask youth to dress up (without purchasing anything) and take selfies. Have youth create a play list that includes line dances, energizers, and some of their favorite songs.
- Consider sending them a “promposal” so they can get the full prom experience.

At Home Prom Recognition:

- Encourage parents to decorate their home or host a formal meal for your “prom” day.
- Family members can create a photo booth area for prom pictures. Find some old hats and costume pieces to liven up the photo booth.

Drivers’ License

Many counties have closed their DMV’s and many of our 16-year-olds are unable to obtain their licenses that they have been excitedly looking forward to getting.

- Send notes to students who are unable to get their license currently. They will be grieving this freedom. Acknowledge this loss but help them recognize that they will be out on the road as soon as the quarantine is lifted.
- If you have the budget, purchase gas gift cards, key rings, or cheap car fresheners that can be sent with the note.
- If your church has stickers with the church logo on it, include this with instructions for placing on their car.

At Home Driving Recognition:

- Ask parents to take pictures of their youth in the driver's seat.
- While we don't want to encourage youth and families to go out into stores. There may be extra time to practice on empty roads and in parking lots while people are isolating.

Youth Sunday:

Many churches look forward to a youth led worship service each year. It's still possible to lead your worshipping community from afar.

- Have a virtual planning meeting and decide on scripture focus and theme for worship. Assign/Distribute parts of worship OR ask youth to volunteer to lead each part of worship. Encourage them to think outside the box and get creative.
- Ask youth to write prayers, calls to confession, etc. for each piece of worship OR provide content to youth.
- Have a virtual dress rehearsal and share with the whole group.
- Have all youth film and submit their piece of the worship service.
- If your Seniors normally give sermons, have them record reflections at home. Compile and use as church-wide virtual worship service.

At Home Worship Recognition:

- If your church does not traditionally have a youth led worship service, consider having youth offer morning or evening prayer services for the congregation.
- Youth may choose to lead a daily prayer service with their families, giving a congregation several weeks of daily prayer services. With a short outline, youth can write prayers, choose scripture and record themselves doing their portion of the service. The daily lectionary can provide guidance for appropriate scripture passages.

Confirmation:

Communicate with families that there will be a formal celebration once worshipping communities can come back together in person.

- If confirmands have mentors, encourage mentors to continue to engage with their partnered youth.
- Suggestions: Weekly virtual prayer time and check-in, written notes, emails, etc.
- Ask session to meet virtually with confirmation class and "examine" them and approve their membership into the worshipping community. Celebrate confirmands on originally scheduled date during virtual worship service.

At Home Confirmation Recognition:

- Parents should encourage youth to write a letter to their mentor/teacher.
- Have everyone in the family write a faith statement and share.
- Parents can share their faith journey and stories from their confirmation or baptism.

Recognition of Volunteers:

Publicly thank and acknowledge volunteers/mentors/youth group advisors for their year of service and commitment to the youth of the church. Even though cut short, it's important to recognize their commitment and dedication.

- Note or letter from church staff or ask youth to write note(s).

- Highlight volunteers on social media.
- Deliver small tokens of thanks (gift card to local restaurant or business to be used later, plant to symbolize all they have done to help the youth of your church grow, devotional book)
- Recognitions might happen with names being read in a virtual worship service, photos or first names may be listed on the church website.
- Invite volunteers to a Zoom party where you can say things you are thankful for about each volunteer (or team) and then pray together.

Stepping Up

Helping young people transition from one stage to the next will be just as important since their time has been cut short prior to significant “graduations.”

- Meet online with fifth graders at the end of the traditional school year to welcome them to youth group.
- If you have youth t-shirts, consider dropping them off at their home with a welcome to youth group note.
- Recognize these incoming sixth graders during youth led worship or other service that marks the end of the school year.
- Help your eighth graders move into the high school youth group by inviting them to virtually meet with your ninth and tenth graders. For this time together, have the ninth and tenth graders prepare a top ten list of things to know about high school. Encourage them to keep the message positive.
- Assign a mentor for each stepping up student, so they have someone in the class ahead of them guiding them through and checking in with them periodically.

At Home Stepping Up Recognitions

- Even if your student is familiar with the school where they will be attending in the fall, drive by the school and look at the school website for a virtual tour or map of the school.
- Talk about how your child will be getting to their new school (bus, walk, parent drop off, carpool).
- Discuss your experiences with moving on to the next grade. Share your hopes for your child with them.
- Ask your young person what their hopes and fears are as they start in a new school.
- Mark the occasion with a special treat (order a new school t-shirt, ice cream, or bake something together at home).

These suggestions for marking milestones are for youth leaders/church workers & parents to use during this time of disruption and quarantine and can be used to mark special moments during any time of the year.

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